

Another Heaven

Imperial Audiences and the Aesthetics of Ideology in Late Antique Ceremonial

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Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the modes of monarchical representation in imperial ceremonies of late antiquity and their connection to imperial ideology have received scholarly attention from ancient historians and Byzantinists alike. Given this, one may be forgiven for thinking that hardly anything new can be added.¹ In fact, it might even be argued that following a veritable boom in ritual studies across a variety of historical disciplines and periods in the latter half of the last century, too much attention has been paid to it. In *The Byzantine*

1 See, to reference only the most important works, A. Alföldi, *Die monarchische Repräsentation im römischen Kaiserreiche: Mit Register von Elisabeth Alföldi-Rosenbaum* (Darmstadt, 1970), first published in the 1930s as two separate articles, and O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im höfischen Zeremoniell: Vom oströmischen Staats- und Reichsgedanken* (Darmstadt, 1956). Recent decades have seen a renewed interest in the subject. See especially S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1981); M. McCormick, “Analyzing Imperial Ceremonies,” *JÖB* 35 (1985): 1–20; M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, 1986); I. Tantillo, “I ceremoniali di corte in età tardoromana (284–395 d.C.)” in *Le corti nell’alto medioevo: Spoleto, 24–29 aprile 2014*, vol. 1 (Spoleto, 2015), 543–86; F. Guidetti, “Gerarchie visibili: La rappresentazione dell’ordine cosmico e sociale nell’arte e nel ceremoniale tardo-romani,” in *Hierarchie und Ritual: Zur philosophischen Spiritualität in der Spätantike*, ed. C. Tomassi, L. Soares Santoprete, and H. Seng (Heidelberg, 2018), 9–42. For an in-depth, book-length treatment of late antique political ceremonial, see C. Rollinger, *Zeremoniell und Herrschaft in der Spätantike: Die Rituale des Kaiserhofs in Konstantinopel (4.–7. Jh.)* (Stuttgart, forthcoming).

Republic, Anthony Kaldellis points out, rightly, that the scholarship on late antique and Byzantine political ideology and that on actual politics is out of sync.² In terms of political ideology, he contends, the “imperial idea” of Byzantium—the notion of the emperor as the divinely sanctioned, absolute ruler—still dominates scholarship and has obfuscated what actually made the late antique, Byzantine state work³—that

2 A. Kaldellis *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2015). For the purpose of this article, late antiquity is defined roughly as the period between the accession of Constantine I and the Heraclian dynasty; the period beginning with the eighth century is designated early Byzantine. As for ideology, I refer the reader to N. Wiater, *The Ideology of Classicism: Language, History, and Identity in Dionysius of Halicarnassus* (Berlin, 2011), 21–22, who has defined the concept of ideology as the sum of “discursive practices” and quotes Paul Ricoeur (“Can There Be a Scientific Concept of Ideology?,” in *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, ed. J. Bien [The Hague, 1978], 44–59, at 47) in asserting that it contributes to the “shaping of the world according to a set of rules or norms which are provided by the social worlds in which we are organized—‘something out of which we think, rather than something that we think.’”

3 Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 165–98; cf. Av. Cameron, *The Byzantines* (Malden, MA, 2006), 97: “Insofar as there was an official political theory underpinning the Byzantine state, it consisted of the Christianized-ruler theory worked out for Constantine the Great by Eusebius of Caesarea, according to which the empire was the microcosm of heaven and the emperor placed there by God to ensure the maintenance of true religion.” On the late antique development of this idea, see F. Kollb, *Herrscherveideologie in der Spätantike* (Berlin, 2001); M. Meier, “Der Monarch auf der Suche nach seinem Platz: Kaiserherrschaft im frühen Byzanz (5. bis 7. Jahrhundert n.Chr.),” in

is, why emperors were able to rule, how they were able to gain acceptance or legitimacy, and on what their acceptance depended.⁴ A “comprehensive account of a people’s political ontology must, after all, be able to explain their political behavior,” but the imperial idea does not do so. Instead, Kaldellis writes, it is a “castle in the sky (which is what I think the Byzantine court was in fact constructing).”⁵ In addition, as pointed out two decades ago by Philippe Buc in the provocative *Dangers of Ritual*, historians cannot observe rituals and ceremonies of past societies but only read about them in sources with their own discursive, cultural, and political biases.⁶ Trying to identify and “read” the ritual meanings of such ceremonies is thus fraught with significant epistemological difficulties. Such “meanings”

Monarchische Herrschaft im Altertum, ed. S. Rebenich and J. Wienand (Berlin, 2017), 509–44.

⁴ By acceptance, I mean the acquiescence of decisive sectors of Roman society in the rule of a specific emperor or dynasty. Egon Flraig first introduced the concept of Roman emperorship as an *Akzeptanzsystem* (acceptance system) in 1992. More recently, see E. Flraig, *Den Kaiser herausfordern: Die Usurpation im Römischen Reich*, 2nd rev. ed. (Frankfurt am Main), 2019. See H. Brandt, *Die Kaiserzeit: Römische Geschichte von Octavian bis Diocletian* (Munich, 2021), for a general overview of Roman imperial history from this perspective, and R. Pfeilschifter, *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel: Kommunikation und Konflikttausch in einer spätantiken Metropole* (Berlin, 2013), for the late antique monarchy as an *Akzeptanzsystem*. This approach deserves wider reception in the Anglosphere than it has so far received. B. Chrubasik, *Kings and Usurpers in the Seleukid Empire: The Men Who Would Be King* (Oxford, 2016), appears to be the only book-length engagement with it so far. On the problems of “legitimacy” as a concept, see J. Lendon, “The Legitimacy of the Roman Emperor: Against Weberian Legitimacy and Imperial ‘Strategies of Legitimation,’” in *Herrschafsstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis: Konzepte, Prinzipien und Strategien der Administration im römischen Kaiserreich*, ed. A. Kolb (Berlin, 2006), 53–66, and cf. U. Gotter, “Die Nemesis des Allgemein-Gültigen: Max Webers Charisma-Konzept und die antiken Monarchien,” in *Das Charisma: Funktionen und symbolische Repräsentationen*, ed. P. Rychterová, S. Seit, and R. Veit (Berlin, 2008), 173–86.

⁵ Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, 168.

⁶ P. Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001), passim. See also McCormick, “Analyzing Imperial Ceremonies,” on methodological issues of studying Byzantine ceremonies in particular. The difference between ritual and ceremony (and symbolic acts) is difficult to pin down exactly. For the purposes of this article, and conscious of the potential aporia of such a definition, ritual is considered to be a transformative performative action—e.g., a coronation or baptism—and ceremony to be a representative performance. The former leads to a change in status, the latter affirms it.

are considerably less fixed than historians of the past decades have confidently assumed.⁷

Ceremonial in and of itself explains nothing, and Kaldellis is right in maintaining that the imperial idea alone is not a sufficient basis for understanding the late antique or Byzantine emperorship. To approach these subjects otherwise, as has mostly been done for the past century, is to privilege the view officially propagated by the court. The intention here, however, is not to outline a political theory of late antique statesmanship, but to stress the importance of understanding the official view in all of its dimensions and expressions. Ceremonies in particular never have only one meaning or intention, though they may well have a primary one, intended and constructed by the masters of ceremony. There are a plethora of secondary meanings and symbolic implications that depend on the sociocultural, religious, and political contexts of each participant in the ceremony.

The focus here is therefore on both the imperial court’s “castle in the sky” and the way in which imperial ideologemes are enacted, performed, and received in ceremonial. The two goals are to analyze a specific form of late antique imperial ceremony, to show what messages and ideologemes were meant to be communicated, and to examine how the ideological themes of emperorship expounded upon in the literary sources find their reflections and embodiments in actual ceremonies.⁸ A holistic approach to imperial ceremonial is

⁷ This is the main criticism of Buc, *Dangers of Ritual*, but see the reply in G. Koziol, “The Dangers of Polemic: Is Ritual Still an Interesting Topic of Historical Study?,” *EME* 11 (2002): 367–88. Koziol is one of the main advocates of medieval ritual studies. Also see the more measured reflections in C. Pössel, “The Magic of Early Medieval Ritual,” *EME* 17 (2009): 111–25, esp. 112: “It is always useful, after some years of research, to have somebody like Philippe Buc come along and wonder if it’s not all bunk, after all.” Buc’s criticism applies most of all to the application of ritual studies in Western medieval contexts, where they are both more established and often more pointed than in ancient history or Byzantine studies. Nevertheless, Pössel’s point—that ritual interpreted as a quasi-magical, transformative moment has been mystified and overstretched as an end-all argument—is salient for both disciplines.

⁸ The ideologeme is the basic, fundamental unit of ideology; see M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin, 1981), 429. See also T. Lylo, “Ideologemes as a Representative of the Basis Concept of Ideology in the Media Discourse,” *Social Communication* 1 (2017): 14–20, esp. 19: “The ideologeme is a unit of ideology and its explication. It can not only form an individual’s attitude to reality, but primarily it can construct this reality on the axiological level and even replace it.”

taken by reconstructing the choreography and grammar of ceremonial performances, interpreting their semiotics, and identifying their ideological background. Doing so involves combining an analysis of literary ekphrases and narratives with an investigation of the materiality and sensuality of court ceremonial. For this purpose, Alexei Lidov's concept of hierotopy, which he developed within the context of Byzantine art history and icon veneration, is adapted and used as a theoretical and methodological framework. The goal is, again, twofold: first, to show by example that this framework can be gainfully adapted to study imperial ceremonies and performance generally and, second, to argue that ceremonial was not simply unidirectional, but that its top-down planning and performance allowed for bottom-up perceptions and interpretations as well.

The analysis focuses on one particular form of ceremony—the audience, or reception.⁹ This is in part

⁹ The audience has been somewhat understudied compared to more spectacular occasions, such as a triumph (*adventus*) or coronation, but see A. Becker, “Verbal and Nonverbal Diplomatic Communication at the Imperial Court of Constantinople (Fifth–Sixth Centuries),” *DOP* 72 (2018): 79–82; A. Becker, *Dieu, le souverain et la cour: Stratégies et rituels de légitimation du pouvoir impérial dans l’Antiquité tardive et au haut Moyen Âge* (Bordeaux, 2022), 149–254; C. Rollinger, “The Importance of Being Splendid: Competition, Ceremonial and the Semiotics of Status at the Court of the Late Roman Emperors (4th–6th Centuries),” in *Gaining and Losing Imperial Favour in Late Antiquity: Representation and Reality*, ed. K. Choda, M. Sterk de Leeuw, and F. Schulz (Leiden, 2020), 36–72; C. Rollinger, “These Boots Aren’t Made for Walking: Tetrarchic Ceremonies as a Language of Authority,” in *The Tetrarchy as Ideology: Reconfigurations and Representations of an Imperial Power*, ed. F. Carlà-Uhink and C. Rollinger (Stuttgart, 2023), 93–118; Rollinger, *Zeremoniell und Herrschaft* (chap. 5). For an innovative study of imperial admission ceremonies during the Principate, and a short coda on their development in late antiquity, see M. Lindholmer, “Rituals of Power: The Roman Imperial Admission from the Severans to the Fourth Century” (PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, 2020); M. Lindholmer, “Cassius Dio and the Ritual of the Imperial Admission,” in *The Intellectual Climate of Cassius Dio: Greek and Roman Pasts*, ed. A. M. Kemezis, C. Bailey, and B. Poletti (Leiden, 2022), 226–52. As with most other ceremonial matters, the later forms of such audiences and receptions (i.e., middle Byzantine court ceremonial) have received more attention than those from earlier periods, particularly the admissions of foreign ambassadors. See F. Tinnefeld, “Ceremonies for Foreign Ambassadors at the Court of Byzantium and Their Political Background,” *ByzF* 19 (1993): 193–213; O. Kresten, “Sprachliche und inhaltliche Beobachtungen zu Kapitel I 96 des sogenannten ‘Zeremonienbuches,’” *BZ* 93 (2000): 474–89; F. A. Bauer, “Potentieller Besitz: Geschenke im Rahmen des byzantinischen Kaiserzeremoniells,” in *Visualisierungen von Herrschaft: Frühmittelalterlicher Residenzen*.

because the audience—the emperor’s reception of “visitors” or courtiers in a formal setting—was one of the most strictly choreographed and tightly controlled ceremonies known. Those invited and received at the audience came to the emperor as if going to stand before God himself. The ceremony took place at the Great Palace, deep inside the labyrinthine, centuries-old assemblage of residential, administrative, and generally imposing imperial buildings that occupied the entire southeastern corner of Constantinople. The location afforded the masters of ceremony complete control over the mise-en-scène as well as the dramatis personae; they chose whom they allowed into their midst and then determined what path they would take to get to the specified audience hall in addition to what buildings, views, artworks, décors, and assembled groups of courtiers or soldiers they would see. The goal was to leave little chance for the unforeseen and little to no margin for improvisation that might tarnish the image of imperial order and majesty that the ceremony was meant to impart. During perambulations or processions through the city, residents sometimes pelted emperors with stones, as Theodosius II (r. 402–450) experienced in 431. In the Hippodrome, the crowd might jeer, make impudent demands, or even riot, as Anastasios (r. 491–518) and Justinian (r. 527–565) found on several occasions.¹⁰ At the court, however,

Gestalt und Zeremoniell—Internationales Kolloquium, 3./4. Juni 2004 in Istanbul, ed. F. A. Bauer (Istanbul, 2006), 135–70; M. Luchterhandt, “Bilder ohne Worte: Protokoll und höfischer Luxus in den Empfangszeremonien des mittelbyzantinischen Kaiserhofs,” in *Streit am Hof im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. M. Becher and A. Plassmann (Göttingen, 2011), 331–64; N. Drocourt, *Diplomatie sur le Bosphore: Les ambassadeurs étrangers dans l’empire byzantin des années 640 à 1204*, 2 vols. (Louvain, 2015), 2:487–584; T. Hoffmann, “Von verlorenen Hufeisen und brennenden Nüssen—Über Konflikte im Rahmen des ‘diplomatischen’ Zeremoniells des byzantinischen Kaiserhofes,” in *Transcultural Approaches to the Concept of Imperial Rule in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Scholl, T. Gebhardt, and J. Clauß (Frankfurt am Main, 2017), 221–44; A. Beihammer, “Ceremonies and Court Rituals in Byzantine Imperial Audiences in the Time of the First Crusade,” in *The Ceremonial of Audience: Transcultural Approaches*, ed. E. Orthmann and A. Kollatz (Bonn, 2019), 37–62.

¹⁰ For stones thrown at Theodosius, see Marc. Com. ad a. 431.3 (T. Mommsen, ed., *Chronica minoria saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, vol. 2 [Berlin, 1894], 37–108); for Anastasios confronting protests connected to changes introduced to the Trisagion formula in 512, see Marc. Com. ad a. 512.2–8 (ed. Mommsen); for Justinian being importuned with demands for bread in the Hippodrome, with a Persian envoy accompanying him in the *kathisma*, see John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.121

the palace staff exerted a greater degree of control over the performance, and when someone, such as an ambassador, opened the door to potential embarrassment by refusing to adhere to ceremonial niceties, the episode remained shielded from the full view of the public. As a result, one finds little to no mention of such events.¹¹ This makes the audience ceremonial in the palace eminently suited for the case study here.

There are also important practical advantages to focusing on the audience. For one, extensive and detailed sources recount specific audiences, and

(J. Thurn, ed., *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, CFHB 35 [Berlin, 2000], 418), and compare the angry back-and-forth in Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle AM 6024* (C. de Boor, ed., *Theophanis Chronographia*, 2 vols. [Leipzig, 1883], 181–83), and *Chron. Pasch.*, ad a. 531 (L. Dindorf, ed., *Chronicon Paschale*, CSHB [Bonn, 1832], 620).

11 The issue of ceremonial violations, though of great interest, can only be briefly alluded to here. Drocourt, *Diplomatie sur le Bosphore*, 2:572–83, discusses them in more detail, but tellingly, all of the examples are of a later date than discussed here, touching on Byzantine diplomatic relations with Islamic and Latin polities. There are occasional hints of similar events in late antiquity, but they are seldom recounted in any detail, including the reactions by palace staff. Valentinian I, notorious for his angry outbursts, is said to have died from a stroke brought on by a fit of apoplectic rage at the impertinence of ambassadors from the Quadi during negotiations; it appears that he yelled until he collapsed on the floor, dead. See Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.31; Amm. Marc. 30.6.1–6; Zos. 4.17. It should be noted, however, that imperial rage was not necessarily negatively connotated in late antiquity, but could be judged an appropriate, and indeed virtuous, response. See C. Malone, “The Virtue of Rage in the Fourth Century,” in *Studies in Emotions and Power in the Late Roman World: Papers in Honour of Ron Newbold*, ed. B. Sidwell and D. Dzino (Piscataway, NJ, 2010), 59–86; B. Sidwell, *The Portrayal and Role of Anger in the Res Gestae of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Piscataway, NJ, 2013), 131–84. Other cases of ceremonial violations mostly involve holy men and ascetics, who enjoyed a degree of παρηστά (candor) unimaginable otherwise. See A. Hasse-Ungheuer, *Das Mönchtum in der Religionspolitik Kaiser Justinians I: Die Engel des Himmels und der Stellvertreter Gottes auf Erden* (Berlin, 2016), 292–95; H. Leppin, “Power from Humility: Justinian and the Religious Authority of Monks,” in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, ed. A. Cain and N. Lenski (Farnham, 2009), 155–64. The Syrian hermit Mare not only exploded in a fit of rage during an audience with Justinian, but also threw a gift of gold coins across the room, denouncing the imperial couple. His biographer, John of Ephesus, forgoes quoting the holy man verbatim for fear that no one would believe him and because it seemed unwise to him to besmirch the saint’s reputation; he asserts that the rulers bore his outburst humbly: John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, PO 18 [Paris, 1924], 630–31. In another case, however, Justinian seems to have lost his patience with the Syrian stylite Zoora and threatened him with physical violence: John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, PO 17 [Paris, 1923], 21–26.

normative, prescriptive texts outline different ceremonial settings. The *Book of Ceremonies*, ordered by Emperor Constantine VII (r. 913–959) and one of two main sources used here, includes accounts of a specific audience granted to Iesdekos, a Persian ambassador in the sixth century, as well as general outlines for audiences involving other visitors.¹² These chapters have been shown to be the work of Peter the Patrician, *magister officiorum* to Justinian, and bear traces not only of his contemporaneity to the events described therein, but also of his responsibilities as magister, the person tasked with arranging diplomatic exchanges and palace ceremonies on the whole and one of the most senior administrative officials in the empire.¹³ The roughly contemporary and remarkably understudied panegyric of Flavius Corippus supplements Peter’s contributions. With *In Praise of Justin* composed on the occasion of the accession of Justin II (r. 565–578), Corippus provides a quasi-official description of events surrounding the events during the first days of his rule, delineating the communicative intentions of the court.¹⁴ His set pieces

12 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.87–90. References to the *Book of Ceremonies* follow the (erroneous) chapter numbering of J. J. Reiske, ed., *Constantini Porphyrogeniti Imperatoris de Ceremoniis Aulae Byzantinae libri duo*, 2 vols., CSHB (Bonn, 1829). Preference is given to this conventional style over the more accurate manuscript numbering adopted in G. Dagron and B. Flusin, ed., *Constantini Porphyrogeniti Liber de ceremoniis*, 6 vols., CFHB 52 (Paris, 2020), as it remains the most commonly used format, but the newly corrected Greek text of Dagron and Flusin is used throughout; A. Moffatt and M. Tall, trans., *Constantine Porphyrogennetos: The Book of Ceremonies* (Canberra, 2012), is used for the translations and modified as necessary. The audience of Iesdekos can be roughly dated since it is known from Procopius and Menander the Guardsman that embassies under Iesdekos arrived in Constantinople in 547, 551, and 557: Procopius, *History of the Wars* 2.28.16 (Isdigousnas), and Menander the Guardsman, *History*, ed. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1985), 6.1, 9.1 (Iesdegousnaph). Cf. I. Dimitroukas, “The Trip of the Great Persian Embassies to Byzantium during the Reign of Justinian I (527–565) and Its Logistics,” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 18 (2008): 171–84.

13 On Peter’s authorship, which is not in dispute, see Dagron and Flusin, *De ceremoniis*, 1:64–70, 4.1:479–81.

14 For the Latin text, the Budé edition is used: S. Antès, ed., *Éloge de l’Empereur Justin II* (Paris, 2002); translations are from Flavius Cresconius Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris: Libri VI*, ed. and trans. Av. Cameron (London, 1976), modified where necessary. In general, work on Corippus has focused on the *Iohannis*, his more well-known epos, but see the papers collected in B. Goldlust, ed., *Corippe, un poète latin entre deux mondes* (Lyon, 2015). On his name, which should probably be rendered as Gorippus, but which will be used in the traditional style here, see P. Riedlberger, “Again on the

include an Avar embassy to Constantinople in 565 led by a man called Targitius that not only includes quite significant ceremonial details, confirming or expanding the image provided in the *Book of Ceremonies*, but also tries to convey an impression of the ceremonial aesthetics to the reader.¹⁵

Some might consider the nature of the sources used here a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they present the rare situation of having two first-rate and almost contemporary source accounts of audiences, and although they belong to two distinct genres of writing, and each poses its own problems in interpretation, they allow one to reconstruct sixth-century audience protocol in surprising detail.¹⁶ On the other hand, both authors focused on a specific form of audience ceremonial—that of the diplomatic exchange,¹⁷ involving the reception of foreign embassies, forgoing

Name ‘Gorippus’: State of the Question—New Evidence—Rebuttal of Counterarguments—The Case of the Suda,” in Goldlust, *Corippe, un poète latin entre deux mondes*, 29–31.

15 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.151–407. A second account of this embassy, differing quite noticeably from that of Corippus, is given in Menander the Guardsman, *History*, frag. 8 (ed. Blockley), which makes no mention of the ceremonial elements. By contrast, the Avar audience is one of the main set pieces of Corippus’s panegyric, and it serves as a showcase for explaining and celebrating a change in Roman policy toward the Avars that would lead to military conflict and significant reversals for the Roman Empire. See W. Pohl, *Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n.Chr.* (Munich, 1988), 48–51; G. Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th Century AD: Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Leiden, 2018), 20–42.

16 Cf. Bauer, “Potentieller Besitz,” for a comparative analysis of these two sources and the later narrative of Liudprand of Cremona.

17 Surprisingly, while all recent major studies on late antique diplomacy stress the importance of ceremonial in diplomatic protocol, they do so somewhat cursorily, without engaging in-depth with the sources describing it, and without giving much thought to the role of ceremonial in interstate communication. See A. Gillett, *Envoy and Political Communication in the Late Antique West*, 411–533 (Cambridge, 2003); E. Nechaeva, *Embassies—Negotiations—Gifts: Systems of East Roman Diplomacy in Late Antiquity* (Stuttgart, 2014). W. Pohl, “Ritualized Encounters: Late Roman Diplomacy and the Barbarians, Fifth–Sixth Century,” in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou, and M. Parani (Leiden, 2013), 67–86, is a notable exception. A. Becker, *Les relations diplomatiques romano-barbares en Occident au V^e siècle: acteurs, fonctions, modalités* (Paris, 2013) does engage with diplomatic protocol, albeit very briefly (but cf. Becker, “Verbal and Nonverbal”); the discussion in Becker, *Dieu, le souverain et la cour*, 151–88, is more detailed. Drocourt, *Diplomatie sur le Bosphore*, 2:487–585, is a detailed analysis of the ceremonial elements of diplomacy, but mostly focuses

those for courtiers, senators, or other members of the Roman elite or court. Rather than being a hindrance, however, for the purposes here, this is in fact an advantage. For one, the diplomatic context would have led to an even greater determination by palace, or *magisterium*, staff to exert tight control over the whole affair, since presenting the intended image of imperial might would have been particularly important on these occasions. In addition, the presence at these events of courtiers and senators, as well as foreign diplomats from different sociocultural backgrounds, lends itself well to the analysis here. Notably, for example, no chapter in the *Book of Ceremonies* details general late antique receptions, or admissions, of senators or officials other than to communicate appointments, promotions, and retirements.¹⁸ Such admissions, akin to the *salutationes* of the Principate, are mentioned only in short asides or as preludes to other audiences, such as diplomatic ones.¹⁹ There are hints in the sources that imperial admissions—that is, the ceremonialized but quotidian salutation of the emperors from the Principate—survived into late antiquity and were further developed, for instance, first by adopting the *adoratio* (genuflection) and later the complete *proskynesis* (prostration) as ceremonial forms of greeting the emperor.²⁰ As mentioned, imperial ceremonial should not be conceived of as addressing only a single, primary audience, but rather as communicating different (albeit overlapping) ideological messages to several different (and overlapping) audiences at the same time. The full import of the semiotically and ideologically charged performances of diplomatic ceremonial can only be understood if one also considers these secondary addressees. Thus, a first and a second “reading” of the audience ceremonies described in the sources is proposed to show that in interpreting them, care should be taken to differentiate between individual ideological and performative levels.

on early and middle Byzantine contexts (though with frequent references to late antiquity).

18 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.84–86 (ed. Reiske, 286–389). Cf. Rollinger, “Being Splendid.”

19 On the *salutationes*, see Lindholmer, “Rituals of Power.”

20 Generally, on the potential survival of salutations into late antiquity, see Lindholmer, “Rituals of Power,” 81–152; cf. Rollinger, “These Boots.”

The first of this article's three main sections consists of a general description of audiences, particularly those involving foreign envoys, in the sixth century and proposes the first reading of this particular kind of ceremony—that is, the primary communicative intent of the creators and performers toward their primary audience, the envoys. By necessity, this constitutes a generalized and diachronic view of the ceremonial, extracted from the sources, which are a mixture of historical accounts, prescriptive texts, and panegyrics. Drawing an image of the audience in general relies particularly on the *Book of Ceremonies* and on Corippus, judiciously supplemented at points by pertinent earlier and later sources. This generalized reconstruction serves as an abstract template for diplomatic audiences, which were naturally subject to change across the centuries and moreover could be (and were) modified according to political aims and case-specific constraints. The short second section introduces, adapts, and applies the conceptual and methodological foundations developed by Alexei Lidov, which are then used in the third section to undertake a second reading to arrive at a fuller understanding of the ceremonial. The intention is not only to provide a better, more complete understanding of ceremonial as such, but also to offer a new approach to the study of late antique imperial ceremonial and its connection to imperial ideology.

Audiences and Their Reconstruction: A First Reading

In the run-up to the diplomatic audience proper, those to be received by the emperor were led through the city, from their lodgings to the Chalkē Gate, the main entrance of the Great Palace, and from there onto the palace grounds. Inside the palace en route to the audience, they passed the offices of the magisterium and a porticus that the middle Byzantine sources call the Makron of the Kandidatoi, likely abutting the guard barracks. Corippus does not identify the precise location for the audience itself, hinting only that it takes place in a "lofty hall in the huge building."²¹ It may be that the various audiences were held in a different building, but little can be gleaned from the sources. A description in the *Book of Ceremonies*, however, reveals

²¹ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.191–93: *atria praelargis extant altissima tectis*.

that late antique diplomatic audiences took place at the least in the so-called Great Consistory, a building about which little else is known.²² Before entering the Consistory, the envoy and his entourage were first led into the Anticonsistory (or Winter Consistory), a separate, adjacent waiting area.²³ Armed guards, standard bearers, and other representatives of the palace were

²² The Consistory was the main audience hall of the palace until the construction of the Chrysotriklinos in the second half of the sixth century. The Magnaura, mentioned by Liudprand and in the *Book of Ceremonies* 2.15 as the main diplomatic audience hall, was of an even later date. See J. Kostenec, "Studies on the Great Palace in Constantinople II: The Magnaura," *BSL* 60 (1999): 161–82. The Consistory was likely laid out in the shape of an apsidal basilica, for which there exists ample parallel evidence in private, episcopal, and imperial architecture of late antiquity. It may have had three naves separated by rows of columns, as the Hall of the Nineteen Couches did, though that is uncertain. The *Book of Ceremonies* 1.46 (ed. Reiske 234) states that there were three doors, inlaid with ivory (*οἱ τρεῖς πυλῶνες οἱ ἐλεφάτινοι τοῦ κονσιστωρίου*) at each end of the building, but this does not necessarily imply a similar arrangement on the inside. It is equally possible that the building instead followed the example of the Constantinian Aula Palatina in Trier, which has only one main nave. The Consistory was located in the so-called Daphne, the oldest area of the palace, which included the earliest attested buildings and likely dated back to Constantine (r. 306–337) himself. J. Kostenec, "The Heart of the Empire: The Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors Reconsidered," in *Secular Buildings and the Archaeology of Everyday Life in the Byzantine Empire*, ed. K. Dark (Oxford, 2004), 4–6, on the other hand, sees the Consistory as a later addition, perhaps built under Constantius II (r. 337–361). It was perhaps aligned on a west–east axis: N. Westbrook, *The Great Palace in Constantinople: An Architectural Interpretation* (Turnhout, 2019), 176, fig. 51; contra, R. Guillard, *Études de topographie de Constantinople byzantine*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, 1969), 1:56, and Kostenec, "The Heart of the Empire," esp. 8, both of whom posit a north–south axis, abutting the Delphax, or Great Tribunal, a spacious inner court used for assemblies around which the main palace buildings—the Hall of the Nineteen Couches, Augousteus, and Consistory—were arranged. On the Daphne area, see A. Calahorra Bartolomé, "On the Toponymics of the Great Palace of Constantinople: The Daphne," *BZ* 114 (2022): 1–46; cf. J. Ebersolt, *Le Grand Palais de Constantinople et le Livre des Cérémonies* (Paris, 1910), 39–48, and Guillard, *Études*, 1:56–69, on the possible Constantinian origins.

²³ The question of the relationship between the Small and Large Consistory is difficult to answer. Occasionally, Summer and Winter Consistories are also mentioned, but these are likely just alternative descriptors for the same buildings. The Small Consistory may be the entrance area identified as the *anticonsistorion* in the *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89. Westbrook, *Great Palace*, 206, designates the Winter Consistory an ancillary room to the (Summer) Consistory. For the purposes of the description of the ceremony, I assume that the Small/Winter Consistory denotes the entrance area, that is, the Anticonsistory.

posted everywhere, including in large numbers at the entrances to the Consistory.²⁴ Before the ceremony began, the emperor entered, accompanied by the magister officiorum and court eunuchs, and sat on the throne, situated in the middle of the room.²⁵ If the Consistory was, in fact, an apsidal audience hall, the throne would likely have been positioned in the apse itself. An elaborate, dome-shaped canopy covered the throne, which at that point was hidden from view by curtains hanging between the canopy's arches. The throne was likely elevated on a podium from which three steps led into the main area of the hall.²⁶

With the emperor seated, the courtiers and officials (*ἄρχοντες*, in the *Book of Ceremonies*) filed in to assemble in the Consistory, wearing dark russet chlamyses of pure silk.²⁷ At the same time, the *admissionalis*, the official in charge of the ceremony, and officials

24 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.207–9. Cf. *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 404), for the “bearers of the labara.” There is also mention of pages (ed. Reiske, 405.1–2), literally “boys of the nobility” (*πούερας εὐσχήμους*), a transliteration of the Latin *pueros* and a hapax; the explanatory scholion to the Lipsiensis manuscript adds “children, boys” (*παιδάς*). As far as I am aware, this is the only attestation of such pages, rendering it difficult to know what to make of it.

25 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 405), actually only mentions a “patrician” accompanying the emperor, which has been taken as a reference to Peter. Becker, *Dieu, le souverain et la cour*, 164, notes, however, that this is not the only official with patrician status, and it may be that it was the chamberlain of the palace (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*) who accompanied him.

26 For curtains sectioning off an area inside the Consistory, likely the location of the throne and canopy, see Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Saint Sabas* 51, 71 (E. Schwartz, ed., *Kyrill von Skythopolis* [Leipzig, 1939]). Similarly, *Book of Ceremonies* 1.1 attests that the imperial table (*akkoubiton*) in the Hall of the Nineteen Couches, could be hidden behind curtains. The existence of a podium or tribunal on which the throne was situated is admittedly conjectural, but in middle Byzantine sources, the imperial position is usually described as being up three steps. See, for example, the *Kletorologion* of Philotheos (N. Oikonomidès, ed. and trans., *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* [Paris, 1972], 167–69). On ceremonial curtains in general, see M. Parani, “Mediating Presence: Curtains in Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonial and Portraiture,” *BMGS* 42 (2018): 1–25.

27 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 405). Irritatingly, Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.209–14, gives an inverse ceremonial order. In his narrative, the emperor, surrounded by eunuchs and high officials, enters last, after all the other officials have taken their places inside the hall. Becker, *Dieu, le souverain et la cour*, 164 n. 71, assumes on the basis of Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.232–33 (*ut laetus princeps solium concendit in altum / membraque purpureae praecellens veste locavit*), that the emperor changes his costume while seated

from the *scrinium barbarorum*, which oversaw foreign affairs, escorted the envoys to their designated positions in the Anticonsistory—“at the wall opposite the curtain” of the Consistory, which indicates that Anticonsistory and Consistory were also separated by curtains, like the emperor was from those in attendance.²⁸ While the envoys assumed their places, the emperor received courtiers and officials, that is, they entered the Consistory and formally greeted him with an act of *adoratio purpurea*, prostrating themselves and kissing the imperial feet.²⁹ After this reception, they returned to their places along the longitudinal walls, ordered according to their status and rank in the court hierarchy.³⁰ According to Corippus, benches decorated with precious fabrics and pillows lined the walls of the Consistory; it is implied that the courtiers and officials followed the ceremony from these benches. If true, this would likely mean the benches were movable grandstands, similar to the ones detailed in Corippus’s later description of the consular procession of Justin II that were constructed or brought in especially for the occasion.³¹ One would usually expect participants in imperial ceremonies to be standing in the presence of the emperor, and it is possible that this was the case here as well. Courtiers standing in a row on graduated, raised benches, arranged one behind the other, would have ensured that every participant had a good view of the ceremony, while at the same time providing a visually impressive spectacle. The *Book of Ceremonies* does not mention benches.

Only after this reception did the magister call for the official ceremony to begin. On his order, a decurion

on the throne, but this seems implausible and is likely a misreading of the text.

28 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 405): *εἰς τὸν τοῖχον ἀντις τοῦ βῆλου*.

29 This may in fact be an instance of the survival into the late antique of earlier imperial admissions of the Principate, mentioned above.

30 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 405).

31 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.205–6: *longoque sedilia compta tenore / clara superpositis ornabant atria velis*; and 3.253–54: *caveam turbasque faventes / lustrant*. In the latter section, Corippus depicts the impressionable envoys as analogous to animals being led into the arena for the slaughter. Thus *cavea*, the term he uses for “grandstands” or “arena seating,” is possibly a rhetorical means of reinforcing that analogy, rather than a factual description. For the grandstand during the consular procession, see Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 4.50–85.

led the *candidati*, the forty elite bodyguards selected for the event as the emperor's guard, into the Consistory and ordered them to take up positions along the left and right walls, positioned in front of the courtiers but, significantly, behind the consuls and consulars.³² The decurion then returned to the antechamber and gave the order “*Leva!*”—to raise the curtains; remarkably, the order is still rendered in Latin in the tenth-century *Book of Ceremonies*.³³ As the curtains were raised, the envoy and his entourage collectively performed proskynesis in the Anticonsistory, touching their heads to the floor, then rose to proceed into the Consistory proper. Here, they again performed proskynesis, at least twice or perhaps three times: immediately after crossing the threshold, “in the middle” (*ἐν τῷ μέσῳ*) of the room, and perhaps once again closer to the emperor, whose feet they were required to kiss. Circular porphyry slabs (*rota*) embedded in the floor marked the respective positions to be taken by the envoys; the *Book of Ceremonies* attests this for the location of the first proskynesis, at the least, and such slabs survive to this day in Hagia Sophia.³⁴ After the first proskynesis of the envoys in the Consistory, attendants pulled aside the curtains shielding the emperor from view.³⁵ After the envoys had risen for the last time, the diplomatic *honneurs* were exchanged. The lead envoy and the emperor exchanged a few words of greeting; if the envoys were Persian, the emperor enquired about his peer, the Persian ruler. The head envoy then offered the

traditional gifts; the presentation, receiving, and cataloguing of such gifts took a significant amount of time and followed a precise administrative choreography.³⁶ Such was the initial audience.

No proper diplomatic business or negotiation was undertaken on this occasion. With the handing over of the gifts, the audience effectively ended, and the emperor promised to meet again in a few days for discussions. Upon leaving the Consistory, the envoys again performed proskynesis at the appropriate places, the imperial curtains were closed (likely after the first proskynesis), and the envoys left the room. Next, the magister gave the order “*Transfer!*”³⁷ With that, the decurion of the guard led the *candidati* out, followed by the courtiers and officials. The emperor rose and left the Consistory after everyone else had filed out, reinforcing the illusion of a perennially enthroned emperor. During the diplomatic ceremony in the presence of the envoys, he is never seen in motion—neither sitting down or rising from the throne.

It is no great challenge to identify the *prima facie* communicative intent behind the diplomatic audience. As the majority of known accounts attest, such elaborate ceremonial receptions for envoys and ambassadors took place “to better overawe foreign emissaries at court”; they served as “an instrument of persuasion.”³⁸ Audrey Becker, in her study of diplomatic relations between Romans and “barbarians” in the fifth century, emphasized the key role of the imperial audience in late antique diplomacy.³⁹ In her persuasive view, audiences were contests of one-upmanship, moments in which hierarchies and tensions between polities became manifest and in which each side attempted to outdo the other, “de s'imposer à l'autre.”⁴⁰ This hypothesis, which she applied specifically to the Western Roman Empire, can be transposed without qualification to the Eastern Roman Empire. A statement by Franz Alto Bauer applies to all embassies, but perhaps especially for those described in the *Book of Ceremonies* and Corippus: “The

32 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 406).

33 Cf. B. Adamik, “Zur Problematik der lateinischsprachigen Bevölkerung in Konstantinopel: Das Zeugnis der lateinischen Texte in dem Werk *De ceremoniis aulae Byzantinae* des Kaisers Konstantin VII. Porphyrogennetos,” in *Latin vulgaire-latin tardif VI: Actes du VI^e colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif*, Helsinki, 29 août–2 septembre 2000, ed. H. Solin, M. Leiwo, and H. Hallo-Aho (Hildesheim, 2003), 201–18, esp. 212.

34 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 406): πορφυροῦν μάρμαρον. For similar floor markings, see P. Schreiner, “Omphalion und Rota Porphyretica: Zum Kaiserzeremoniell in Konstantinopel und Rom,” in *Byzance et les Slaves: Mélanges Ivan Dujcev* (Paris, 1979), 401–10. In Corippus’s description, the floors and walls are covered with textiles (carpets and wall hangings): Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.10–19. This may signify an alternative decorative pattern, but it is equally possible that the carpets did not cover the whole interior of the Consistory. Cf. *Book of Ceremonies* 2.15 (ed. Reiske, 571–74), for later audiences in the Magnaura. The *Book of Ceremonies* provides a detailed list of decorative and functional elements such as *polykandela*.

35 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.252–64.

36 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 407).

37 The Lipsiensis has “STRANFER” in Latin letters; a scholion explains the meaning of the by-then unknown order in Greek: *Book of Ceremonies* 1.89 (ed. Reiske, 407).

38 E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 125.

39 Becker, *Relations diplomatiques*, 167.

40 Becker, *Relations diplomatiques*, 166.

display, but even more the limited granting of a part of imperial ceremonial goods . . . showed the emperor's resources, created the illusion of never-ending wealth, and strengthened the spiritual orientation towards Byzantium.”⁴¹

Firsthand accounts survive from a tenth-century emissary to the court in Constantinople that offer important, if indirect, insight into the purpose of the audience ceremonial from the perspective of its principal addressee—the envoy himself. Liudprand of Cremona was the emissary first of Berengar of Italy and then of Otto I to the emperors Constantine VII, Nikephoros Phokas (r. 963–969), and John Tzimiskes (r. 969–976), and in his historical narratives (the *Antapodosis* and the *Relatio de legationis Constantinopolitana*), he provides an on-the-ground perspective. Liudprand, to be sure, is a late source in the context of the present study, and one must treat the information proffered by him with due care.⁴² Not only had the ceremonies he describes changed markedly from those of the sixth century, but so had the buildings of the palace, the relationship between Byzantium and the former *pars occidentalis* of the empire, and, indeed, the empire over which the emperors on the Bosphorus presided. It is apparent from his account, however, that contemporary diplomatic protocol, while certainly different and more elaborate and theatrical, remained structurally similar to that of the sixth century. His wonder at the ceremony and the splendor of the surroundings can still be felt in his account, though he did his level best not to embarrass himself in front of the emperor, and certainly not in the minds of his readers.

As a shrewd diplomat, Liudprand had inquired among other envoys about the details of the ceremony. Having been forewarned, he adopted an attitude of ostentatious nonchalance in his report, emphasizing that he was “not moved by either terror or admiration” (*nullo . . . terrore, nulla admiratione commotus*) at the reception.⁴³ It seems apparent that the purpose of the entire ceremony in the sixth century as well as in the tenth was to evoke precisely these emotions: terror and

fear of the power and majesty of emperor and empire accompanied by admiration and astonishment at the splendor and wealth of the court.⁴⁴ Both sets of emotions, which the theatrical staging and the exuberant pomp of the ceremony were in aid of, served the narrative of the civilizational superiority of the Roman state. Corippus, presenting the quasi-official view of the court, compares the Avar envoys of 565 to the animals being herded into the arena during a *venatio*—impressed by the splendor of the palace, cowed by the presence of splendid palace guards, and in awe of the assembled officials and courtiers watching them.⁴⁵ Moreover, this comparison also plays into the trope of Roman civilizational superiority, for the envoys were like wild animals, literally brought to their knees before the majesty of the Roman people, personified by the emperor.

The physical setting that the envoys encountered during such embassies must have indeed been intimidating, both by virtue of the décor and the pomp and circumstance, but also, and perhaps more tangibly, by the large number of armed bodyguards and soldiers, whose presence is attested in the *Book of Ceremonies* and whose effects on the envoys Corippus dramatically describes in his panegyric. In the palace, emissaries were

⁴⁴ Cf. the telling reasoning behind the compilation of the *Book of Ceremonies* by Constantine VII, as expressed in the preface of book 2: Constantine ordered the compilation in order to make the emperorship seem more “imperial” and awe inspiring (*τὴν μὲν βασιλείαν ταύτην βασιλικωτέραν καὶ φωβερωτέραν ἀποδεικνύντες*). This is also what drove such technological marvels as the Throne of Solomon, or the hydraulic menagerie in the throne room famously described by Liudprand, *Antapodosis* 6.5 (ed. Chiesa) and for which there is no late antique equivalent. On the hydraulic automata, see G. Brett, “The Automata in the Byzantine ‘Throne of Solomon,’ *Speculum* 29 (1954): 477–87; N. Maliaras, *Die Orgel im byzantinischen Hofzeremoniell des 9. und des 10. Jahrhunderts: Eine Quellenuntersuchung* (Munich, 1991), 137–79; C. Canavas, “Automaten in Byzanz: Der Thron von Magnaura,” in *Automaten in Kunst und Literatur des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. K. Grubmüller and M. Stock (Wiesbaden, 2003), 49–72. Scholars have previously been content to regard such ceremonial gimmicks as vain pretense (e.g., A. Toynbee, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and His World* [London, 1973], 498), yet these *Verwunderungsmaschinen*, as Constantin Canavas called them, have a long tradition in monarchical contexts (e.g., H. von Hesberg, *Mechanische Kunstwerke und ihre Bedeutung für die höfische Kunst des frühen Hellenismus* [Marburg, 1987], 47–72) and an ideological dimension as well as being part of a “system of refined semiotics . . . which was open to any kind of sophisticated nuances in order to express meaningful variations of the political atmosphere” (Tinnefeld, “Ceremonies for Foreign Ambassadors,” 213).

⁴⁵ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.245–54.

⁴¹ Bauer, “Potentieller Besitz,” 164.

⁴² Pfeilschifter, *Kaiser und Konstantinopel*, 87–91.

⁴³ Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis* 6.5 (P. Chiesa, ed., *Liutprandi Cremonensis Opera Omnia*, CCCM 156 [Turnhout, 1998]). The exact date of his first embassy is still debated, with proposals ranging from 947 to 950, but his second sojourn was in 968.

also surrounded at all times by court officials and dignitaries, who appeared in full court regalia. How could they not be impressed? Even if the caustic judgment of the sixth-century historian Agathias, who derides the palace guards as civilians in splendid uniforms, is perhaps exaggerated, the representative aspect of these bodyguards would have been as important on such occasions as the physical protection of the emperor. The guards served to heighten the splendor of the ceremony and the strength of Roman arms, “to emphasize the pomp and imperial majesty when performed in public,” as Agathias wrote, and to demonstrate the sheer number of servants to which the emperor had recourse.⁴⁶ Corippus described the scene as follows:

By the command of the ruler all the leaders were summoned, every troop [*schola*] of the palace was ordered to take up its position. And now in fixed order the throng of *decani*, *cursores*, *agentes in rebus* and with them the white band [*candidate*] with the palatine *tribuni* and the troop of protectors under the control of their *magister*, and all the strength of the holy officials was there, in different uniforms, clothing, dress and appearance.⁴⁷

Corippus’s account further emphasizes this show of strength when sketching the preparations for the audience, emphasizing the physical appearance of the participants, especially the bodyguards. In the fourth century, the military writer Vegetius had recommended that attention be paid to the appearance of soldiers and had maintained that the pageantry of arms could serve to inspire great fear (*terror*) in enemies, a commonplace reiterated in the sixth/seventh-century *Strategikon* of Maurice.⁴⁸ Indeed, glittering bodyguards, resplendent in

⁴⁶ Agathias, *History* 5.15.2 (B. G. Niebuhr, ed., *Agathiae Myrinaei Historiarum libri quinque*, CSHB 3 [Bonn, 1828]): ὅγκου τοῦ βασιλείου ἔνεκα καὶ τῆς ἐν ταῖς προόδοις μεγαλαυχίας ἔξευρημένοι.

⁴⁷ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.157–64: *iussuque regentis / acciti proceres omnes, schola quaeque palati est / iussa suis astare locis. Iamque ordine certo / turba decanorum, cursorum, in rebus agentum, / cumque palatinis stans candida turba tribunis / et protectorum numerus mandante magistro; / omnis sacrorum vis affuit officiorum / ornatu vario cultuque habituque modoque* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

⁴⁸ Veg., *Mil.* 2.14.68: *plurimum enim terroris hostibus armorum splendor importat*. Cf. Maurice, *Strategikon* 1.2.52 (G. T. Dennis, ed., *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, CFHB 17 [Vienna, 1981]), on the

arms and armor, are a frequent trope in late antique literature that touches upon the figure of the emperor. One finds them in Ammianus’s description of Constantius’s *adventus* into Rome in 357, in Claudian’s panegyrics on Rufinus and Honorius, and in the speeches of Themistius and Synesius.⁴⁹ Their massed appearance during the audience ceremony itself is terrifying in Corippus’s account: the guards posted at the entrance to the Great Consistory are both numerous and standing closely pressed (*condensi numeris*) and “terrible” (*tremendus*) in their contempt and in their gestures (*fastu nutuque*).⁵⁰ The interaction of envoys and bodyguards was not limited to the audience itself. According to Corippus, different units of the bodyguards were stationed as espaliers through which the envoys had to pass throughout their progress in the palace:

The great excubitors who guard the sacred palace were gathered close together in the long porticoes from the very gate and protected right hand and left like a wall, linking their golden shields with their upright javelins. Their sides girded with swords, their legs gripped by boots, they stood, of equal height and glittering equally . . . as leafy oaks. . . . On the left and the right, you could see lines of soldiers standing and glittering in the double light of their double-headed axes, matched in terrible ferocity.⁵¹

equipment of cavalrymen: οὐκ ἀτοπὸν δὲ καὶ γειρομάνικα σιδηρὰ τοὺς βουκελαρίους ἐπινοήσαι καὶ μικρὰ τουφία κατὰ τῶν ὁπισθελίων καὶ ἀντελίων τῶν ἵππων, καὶ φλάμουλα μικρὰ ἐπάνω τῶν ζαβῶν κατὰ τῶν ὄμων. “Οσον γάρ εὔσχημος ἐν τῇ ὀπλίσει ὁ στρατιώτης ἔστιν, τοσοῦτον καὶ αὐτῷ προθυμίᾳ προσγίνεται καὶ τοῖς ἔχτροις δειλίᾳ. G. T. Dennis, trans., *Maurice’s Strategikon: Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy* (Philadelphia, 1984), 12: “It is not a bad idea for the bucellary troops to make use of iron gauntlets and small tassels hanging from the back straps and the breast straps of the horses, as well as small pennons hanging from their own shoulders over the coats of mail. For the more handsome the soldier is in his armament, the more confidence he gains in himself and the more fear he inspired in the enemy.”

⁴⁹ Amm. Marc. 16.10.6–8; Claudian, *In Ruf.* 2.355–65; and *III Cons. Hon.* 134–42; Them. *Or.* 1.1–2. Synesius, *On Royalty* 16.6 (J. Lamoureux, ed., *Synésios de Cyrène*, vol. 5, *Opuscules II*, trans. N. Aujoulat [Paris, 2008]).

⁵⁰ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.207–9: *custodes ardua servant / limina et indignis intrare volentibus obstant / condense numeris, fastu nutuque tremendi*.

⁵¹ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.165–79: *Ingens excubitus divina palatia servans / porticibus longis porta condensus ab ipsa, / murorum in morem laevam dextramque tegebat, / scuta sub erectis*

In the Consistory, the envoys were surrounded by members of a different guard, the candidati.⁵² The description of the bodyguards during the ceremony itself then takes up these same elements: “They saw the tall men standing there, the golden shields, and looked up at their gold javelins as they glittered with their long iron tips and at the gilded helmet tops and red crests. They shuddered at the sight of the lances and cruel axes.”⁵³

The suitably cowed steppe emissaries, Corippus goes on to say, with their outlandish dress and long hair plaited and tied with ribbons—the very model of the warlike and uncultured “barbarian” having arrived in the glittering imperial city—saw the splendid buildings of the palace and the courtiers in their fineries and also took in “the other wonders of the brilliant ceremony and believed that the Roman palace was another heaven.”⁵⁴

Empire as Performance Art

In 2004 Liz James argued that an important part of Byzantine art, ritual, and aesthetics—the synesthetic interplay of senses, particularly in religious contexts—had been overlooked by the Western philosophical view emphasizing sight (with hearing a distant second) over the other senses, which were relegated to “base

coniungens aurea pilis. / Ense latus cincti, praestrikti crura cothurnis, / astabant celsi partier pariterque nitebant / extantes latis umeris durisque lacertis: / coniferae . . . quercus . . . / Et laeva dextraque acies astare videres / multaque ancipes splendescere luce bipennes, / terribili feritate pares (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*, modified). The text is uncertain at lines 178–79, and the connection between *anceps* (sing.) and *bipennum* (pl.) is not evident. Both Antès, *Éloge*, and Ramírez de Verger, ed., *Flavio Cresconio Coripo: El Panegírico de Justino II* (Sevilla, 1985), have *bipennes*; Cameron emends to *bipennum* (p. 106) and translates lines 178–79 as “standing and glittering in the glancing light of their axes.”

52 On the various corps of late antique and Byzantine bodyguards, see R. I. Frank, *Scholae Palatinae: The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire* (Rome, 1969); J. F. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians: An Administrative, Institutional and Social Survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata, c. 580–900* (Bonn, 1984). Christina de Rentiis, at the University of Rostock, is preparing a new and systematic analysis.

53 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.239–42: *ingentes astare viros. Scuta aurea cernunt, / pilaque suspicunt alto splendentia ferro / aurea et auratos conos cristaque rubentes. / Horrescunt lanceas saevasque instare secures* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

54 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.243–44: *ceteraque egiae spectant miracula pompa / et credunt aliud Romana palatia caelum* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*). On the appearance of Avar delegates, see Theophanes, *Chronicle AM 6050* (ed. De Boor 232), and *Anth. Graec.* 16.72.

and corporeal” body functions.⁵⁵ It must be added that ceremonial contexts have suffered the same type of neglect. Like religious worship, imperial ceremonial was not exclusively experienced through sight; it was also heard, smelled, felt, touched, tasted, and otherwise experienced on many different levels. Ceremony, to paraphrase James, badgered all the senses of the participants into engaging with it and its underlying ideas. The interplay of sensory experience and ideological framework transformed political ritual into an imperial “liturgy” and turned imperial representational buildings into quasi-religious places of worship.⁵⁶ To understand this overwhelming sensory and aesthetic impression requires reconstructing and analyzing ceremonies from a holistic point of view, incorporating visual, auditory, tactile, and olfactory elements as well as their interplay in the thoughts and minds of the participants with the ideological framework in which such ceremonies were developed and performed. This synesthetic composition, together with the physical experience and performance of ceremonies, is what makes them such a distinct category, differentiating them from imperial monumental art and portraiture. They are not a static representation of an ideology, or even a “living image of the imperial idea,” as they have recently been described, but its enactment, its performance.⁵⁷ This distinction sounds trivial, though it is anything but.

Studies in ritual practices have shown that participation in physical performances of power, in ceremonies, has a noticeable effect on the participants: it can lead them to internalize the ideology expressed in the ceremony and to acquiesce in the ideas of order and hierarchy that they present. “Doing is believing,” as Barbara Myerhoff put it in her discussion of secular ritual.⁵⁸ To illustrate this point, kneeling before another

55 L. James, “Senses and Sensibility in Byzantium,” *AH* 27 (2004): 522–37, at 525.

56 Bauer, “Potentieller Besitz,” 147: “Ereignisraum einer Liturgie.” Cf. H. Hunger, *Das Reich der Neuen Mitte: Der christliche Geist der byzantinischen Kultur* (Vienna, 1965), 80–81, on the subject of hymns extolling the emperor sung during ceremonies: “Für den Durchschnittsbyzantiner . . . waren die Kaiserhymnen nicht ein bloßer Bestandteil des Zeremoniells, sondern ein Stück Religion.”

57 Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, 168.

58 B. Meyerhoff, “We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusions, Fictions and Continuity in Secular Ritual,” in *Secular Ritual: A Working Definition of Ritual*, ed. S. Falk Moore and B. Meyerhoff (Assen, 1977), 199–226, esp. 223.

person to acknowledge their relative hierarchy is an alien thought to the modern reader, but it was an accepted and universal practice in premodern societies. It is thus important to correctly gauge the subliminal and subtle effect that physical gestures of submission had on those who performed (and observed) them. Modern royal protocol can serve only as a very temperate analogue; for example, the sharply executed nod of the head and curtsy of the British court seem negligible in contrast to the full body prostration expected of late Roman and Byzantine courtiers. Nevertheless, the ritual practice approach to ceremonial and ritual shows that physical practices of ritual reify ideological elements and cultural hierarchies.⁵⁹ In other words, kneeling or prostrating oneself in front of a person deemed (or accepted as) one's superior not only expresses subordination, but in a sense produces it.⁶⁰ Ceremonial thus served to buttress imperial authority by performing a late antique *consensus omnium* in a way that a painted or sculpted representation of an emperor could never do. Rituals, as Clifford Geertz observed, are stories that participants tell themselves about themselves, about their place in the order of things, a "narrative ordering of the world and . . . an agent of change."⁶¹ In political contexts, rituals and ceremonies fulfilled a role similar to *Selbstvergewisserung*, that is, of assertion and acceptance of one's own place in an ordered world. It was "an argument, made over and over again in the insistent vocabulary of ritual, that worldly status has a cosmic base, that hierarchy is the governing principle of the universe."⁶²

Given this particular facet of political ceremonies and the differences between artistic representation and performative enactment, the analysis of imperial ceremonial calls for a different tool set than analyses of, for example, imperial art and iconography. This is particularly important as ceremonies are, by their very nature, transient performances. Regardless of whether they follow a strict form or are adapted to the specific moment, they are constantly evolving, moving, and,

⁵⁹ Cf., e.g., C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, 1992), 197.

⁶⁰ Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 100; C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford, 1997), 160–62.

⁶¹ Lindholmer, "Rituals of Power," 11. C. Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 1–37, at 26.

⁶² C. Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980), 102.

above all, ephemeral. We cannot observe them directly but are dependent on more or less detailed normative texts, written *ekphrases* and historiographic accounts, and rare iconographic representations, each of which includes its own biases. In that sense, too, ceremonies move before one's very eyes, as their descriptions are a function of individual authors' knowledge and experience of them as well as their own auctorial intentions.⁶³ Moreover, any "experience" of ceremonies through text or image has inherent fundamental limits. In some ways, it is simply a case of having to be there, as one cannot fully reproduce the overall sensory impression, which includes olfactory, acoustic, or tactile aspects, though the ancient authors tried. With almost no exceptions, Corippus's effort being one, it was not. How then should one proceed?

It is proposed here to take inspiration from methodological advances in other academic fields. In a series of articles, edited volumes, and books released over the last two decades, the Byzantine art historian Alexei Lidov pioneered a collection of concepts and theoretical frameworks that can provide historians with a methodological approach to better understand ceremonial, "focusing on the different strategies by which the divine, supernatural dimension is spatially, visually, and materially evoked in specific ritual contexts."⁶⁴ His approach is the concept of hierotopy, a term that he prefers to "sacred spaces."⁶⁵ It takes its inspiration terminologically from Foucault's concept of heterotopy—spaces like museums or ships that operate according to different sets of rules than other, regular spaces—but Lidov gives it an aesthetic meaning: hierotopies are conceived as a form of human creativity that produces a communicative space between the profane and the

⁶³ On the methodological problems of studying historic ceremonies, see McCormick, "Analyzing Imperial Ceremonies."

⁶⁴ See the summary of M. Bacci, "Sacred Spaces Versus Holy Sites: On the Limits and Advantages of a Hierotopic Approach," in *Icons of Space: Advances in Hierotopy*, ed. J. Bogdanovic (London, 2021), 16.

⁶⁵ A. Lidov, "The Flying Hodegetria: The Miraculous Icons as Bearer of Sacred Space," in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. E. Thunoe and G. Wolf (Rome, 2004), 291–321; A. Lidov, "Hierotopy: The Creation of Sacred Spaces as a Form of Creativity and Subject of Cultural History," in *Hierotopy: Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. A. Lidov (Moscow, 2006), 32–58; A. Lidov, "Creating the Sacred Space: Hierotopy as a New Field of Cultural History," in *Spazi e percorsi sacri: I santuari, le vie, i corpi*, ed. L. Carnevale and C. Cremonesi (Rome, 2014), 61–89.

sacred through the synesthetic interaction of a range of material and immaterial elements, a “creative fusion of elements often centered around a relic or icon.”⁶⁶ Lidov originally conceived of hierotopies primarily as a means to better understand the performative aspects of sacred milieus and especially the Orthodox Christian practice of icon veneration. By their very nature, the spiritual and even mystic elements inherent in veneration lie somewhat beyond the ken of historians, but in several case studies, Lidov has to good effect demonstrated the historical uses of his methodology, which consists of identifying and studying both material and immaterial elements of religious rituals on the same ontological plane. The material comprises, for example, the individual icon, specific topography or architectural framing, permanent and temporary decorations, participants’ attire and jewelry, and sacred or otherwise important objects, while the immaterial encompasses such elements as smells, noises, tactile impressions, sights, light effects, feelings and affect, religious sentiment, and ideological background. The ensemble of all the individual elements Lidov calls a “spatial icon,” that is a three-dimensional performance encompassing some or all of the elements and thus the result of a specific process of meaning creation.⁶⁷ From the point of view of the art historian, these spatial icons are rather similar in nature and conception to modern performance art.⁶⁸ Like performance art, ceremonies are performed for specific occasions (or only once), often follow a specific

set of rules and conventions, and are thus, in a sense, repetitive, but nevertheless unique in each iteration.⁶⁹

To facilitate and understand spatial icons, Lidov assumes the existence of culture-specific ideological templates that he terms “image ideas” or “image paradigms.”⁷⁰ These may be (and often are) influenced by iconographic or ideological concepts, but they are not necessarily connected to specific illustrations or texts; according to Lidov, they are instead to be understood as part of “a continuum of literary and symbolic meanings and associations.” The image paradigm thus belongs to visual culture but is distinct from “iconographic devices.” Of importance, although it is “visible and recognizable,” it is not “formalized in any fixed state” but rather is similar to “the metaphor that loses its sense in re-telling, or in its de-construction into parts.”⁷¹ Image paradigms are thus a necessary prerequisite for a cultural understanding of rituals and ceremonies by onlookers, and as such Lidov operates in terms of *Rezeptionsästhetik*, the contention that the meaning—for instance, of a work of art, a religious ritual, or a political ceremony—is realized at the point of reception.⁷² There is also the possibility of a creator—such as a master of ceremonies at court—utilizing image paradigms to create a specific spatial icon. Lidov compares such creators to film directors, manipulating and interweaving efforts to create a certain effect.⁷³

Lidov illustrates his approach in a number of case studies centered on specific image paradigms, such as the

66 R. Stearn, *Historiography and Hierotopy: Palestinian Hagiography in the Sixth Century* (Piscataway, NJ, 2020), 16. Cf. N. Dennis, “Bodies in Motion: Visualizing Trinitarian Space in the Albenga Baptistry,” in *Perceptions of the Body and Sacred Space in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*, ed. J. Bogdanovic (London, 2018), 124–48, at 142: “Heavenly visions can be created or divine presence projected through the material and immaterial elements of spatial design, whether physical icons of divine or saintly figures . . . or more ephemeral, sensory agents such as light, sound, scent, taste, or the effects of haptic interactions with material forms within the space.”

67 A. Lidov, “Spatial Icons: A Hierotopic Approach to Byzantine Art History,” in *Toward Rewriting? New Approaches to Byzantine Archaeology and Art: Proceedings of the Symposium on Byzantine Art and Archaeology, Cracow, September 8–10, 2008*, ed. P. Grotowski and S. Skrzyniarz (Warsaw, 2010), 85–100. Cf. A. Simsky, “Image-Paradigms: The Aesthetics of the Invisible,” in Bogdanovic, *Icons of Space*, 29–45, at 29: “a kind of icon, which is not depicted on a flat surface in a usual way but is represented by a number of elements distributed in space.”

68 This point has previously been made by James, “Senses,” 524, who sees in installation art an “odd but effective parallel” to Byzantine art.

69 Lidov, “Creating the Sacred Space,” 78: “[T]he imagery is created in space by dynamically changing forms and the beholder actively participates in the re-creation of the spatial imagery.”

70 A. Lidov, “‘Image-Paradigms’ as a Category of Mediterranean Visual Culture: A Hierotopic Approach to Art History,” in *Crossing Cultures: Papers of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art* (Melbourne, 2009), 148–53. Cf. Simsky, “Image-Paradigms,” 32: “If we were dealing with music, we would be talking about the theme of a musical piece. When it comes to sacred spaces, we can say that such an overall design theme is its image-paradigm.”

71 Lidov, “Image-Paradigms,” 149.

72 C. Martindale, *Redeeming the Text* (Cambridge, 1993), 3. Cf. H. R. Jauss, *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main, 1982); R. Warming, ed., *Rezeptionsästhetik*, 4th ed. (Munich, 1994).

73 Stearn, *Historiography and Hierotopy*, 16: “Like the film director, the hierotopic creator was a creative artist in his own right. It was his task to direct and meld not only architecture and art, but also the many visual, audio, and tactile elements that went into the differentiation of sacred space.”

Heavenly Jerusalem, and their role in shaping a variety of ritual, ceremonial, and aesthetic expressions, or on individual, well-known rituals.⁷⁴ In his perhaps most poignant take, Lidov interprets the annual Byzantine rite of the Flying Hodegetria as a hierotopy. The ritual, performed every Tuesday in front of the Hodegon monastery in Constantinople, consists of the Hodegetria icon being carried in a procession until the icon seizes control of its bearers and, in turn, carries them along, flying, as it were. The image paradigm behind this ritual, according to Lidov, is the display of the Theotokos icon on the walls of Constantinople during the joint Persian-Avar siege of 626. Just as the patriarch had led a procession that included the Hodegetria around the city walls during the siege, so did the icon—miraculously carried by a single man despite its very heavy weight—lead its bearer around the marketplace in front of the Hodegon, thereby creating a sacred place in an analogy of the city space.⁷⁵ His holistic approach, designed to identify and analyze the constitutive elements of what, in the case of the Hodegetria, is at its core a religious enactment, and to integrate the interplay of these elements into an analytical framework, allows one to grasp not only the overall ideological-religious meaning of the ritual, but also its effects. In Lidov's view, the mysticism of religious rituals centered on icons is an irruption of the sacred into the profane realm made possible by the synesthetic experiences of ritual actions and interactions channeled through the icon itself. In several subsequent case studies, Lidov further showed that this framework could function as a heuristic and analytical tool to better grasp those elements of ritual that elude modern rational preconceptions.

This framework can also be applied as a useful *instrumentum studiorum* to imperial, political ritual, which has so far been studied only from more

⁷⁴ A. Lidov, ed., *New Jerusalems: Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces* (Moscow, 2009). For similar approaches, see M. C. Carile, "Imperial Palaces and Heavenly Jerusalem: Real and Ideal Palaces in Late Antiquity," in Lidov, *New Jerusalems*, 78–102; M. C. Carile, *The Vision of the Palace of the Byzantine Emperors as a Heavenly Jerusalem* (Spoleto, 2012); M. Savage, "Building Heavenly Jerusalem: Thoughts on Imperial and Aristocratic Construction in Constantinople in the 9th and 10th Centuries," in *Byzantium in Dialogue with the Mediterranean: History and Heritage*, ed. D. Slootjes and M. Verhoeven (Leiden, 2019), 67–90.

⁷⁵ Lidov "Flying Hodegetria"; A. Lidov, "Spatial Icons: The Miraculous Performance of the Hodegetria of Constantinople," in Lidov, *Hierotopy*, 349–72.

circumspect points of view—as pure representations of ideology, as farcical political theater, or, in the case of audiences for foreign envoys, as enactments of diplomatic antagonism. The nature, ideological background, and religious and spiritual connotations of ceremonial, moreover, have long been subject to rationalist reservations. By contrast, as Averil Cameron pointed out a long time ago, one consequence of official Roman imperial ideology as propagated by the court in a variety of media was to see the ruler as the visible image of God on earth, as an *omnipotentis imago*. This necessarily implied communication, or "movement," between the sacred and the profane; this movement is a core element of late Roman and Byzantine ceremonial.⁷⁶ In fact, to aid this "movement," imperial audience ceremonial consists of a complex interplay of material conditions, synesthetic effects, and performative acts aimed at reproducing a specific image paradigm in the shape of a spatial icon that is visible, audible, smellable, experienceable, and centered on the emperor.

Ceremonial as Hierotopy: A Second Reading

Returning to Corippus's striking turn of phrase about the imperial palace, it is impossible to know whether "another heaven" was indeed the impression that formed in the minds of the Avar envoys. Of course, it is Corippus speaking, not them, but his choice of words is hardly accidental. In his clipped formulation, one can identify the main image paradigm that informed the audience ceremony—that of the Heavenly Jerusalem and, specifically, the Heavenly Court. That a close relationship existed between earthly and heavenly courts in the late Roman and Byzantine *imaginaire* is hardly a novel idea.⁷⁷ For the late Roman and Byzantine court in particular, the sources going back to the Christian political theory of Eusebius of Caesarea are replete with

⁷⁶ Av. Cameron, "The Construction of Court Ritual: The Byzantine Book of Ceremonies," in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. D. Cannadine and S. Price (Cambridge, 1987), 106–36, esp. at 112: a "movement, whether real or symbolic, between sacred and profane contexts." Cf. Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 2.428, on the relationship between God and the emperor: *ille est Omnipotens, hic Omnipotentis imago*.

⁷⁷ See, for instance, Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, passim, but esp. 124–28, for *christomimesis*, and 214–15; Hunger, *Neuen Mitte*, chap. 2; and H. Maguire, "The Heavenly Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, DC, 1997), 247–58.

analogies or similes drawing on that very connection.⁷⁸ For instance, writing in the first half of the sixth century, Agapetus explained the following in *Advice to the Emperor Justinian*:

[Y]ou have a dignity beyond all other, honour, Emperor—beyond all others—God, who dignified you. For it was in the likeness of the Heavenly Kingdom that He [God] gave you the sceptre of earthly rule that you might teach men the protection of justice and drive away the howling of those who rave against it, just as you are ruled by the laws of justice and rule lawfully those subject to you.⁷⁹

78 See also the paired texts by Ps.-Dionysios on *The Celestial Hierarchies* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* (G. Heil and A. M. Ritter, ed., *Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita: De Coelesti Hierarchia, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, De Mystica Theologia, Epistula 2*, rev. ed., PTS 67 [Berlin, 2012]) for a similar model in the church establishment and cf. W. T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford, 2012), 178–200; R. Cormack, “The Emperor at St. Sophia: Viewer and Viewed,” in *Byzance et les images: Cycle de conférences organisé au musée du Louvre par le service culturel du 5 octobre au 7 décembre 1992*, ed. A. Guillou and J. Durand (Paris, 1994), 223–53; esp. 234; Maguire, “Heavenly Court”; A. Eastmond, “The Heavenly Court, Courtly Ceremony, and the Great Byzantine Ivory Triptychs of the Tenth Century,” *DOP* 69 (2015): 71–114. Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, 167–98, has rightly criticized scholars’ dependence on the theocratic conception of Byzantium, based allegedly on Eusebius, as a model for explaining politics and administration. In interpreting ceremonies, which are a performance of ideology, however, ideas first expressed by Eusebius about Christian emperors and held on to by scholars since Norman Baynes’s 1934 article remain relevant explanatory factors.

79 Agapetus, *Advice* (R. Riedinger, ed., *Agapetos Diakonus: Der Fürstenspiegel des Kaisers Justinianos* [Athens, 1995], 26): τιμῆς ἀπάστος ὑπέρετερον ἔχων ἀξίωνα, βασιλεῦ, τιμᾶς ὑπὲρ ἀπαντας τὸν τούτον σε ἀξιώσαντα θεόν, δότι καὶ καθ' ὅμοιωσιν τῆς ἐπουρανίου βασιλείας ἔδωκέ σοι τὸ σκῆπτρον τῆς ἐπιγείου δυναστείας, ἵνα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διδάξῃς τὴν τοῦ δικαίου φυλακήν καὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτούλυστάντων ἐκδιώξῃς τὴν ὑλακήν ὑπὸ τῶν αὐτούς βασιλεύμενος νόμων καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ σὲ βασιλεύων ἐννόμως; for the English, P. N. Bell, trans., *Three Political Voices from the Age of Justinian*, TTH 52 [Liverpool, 2009], 99). Perhaps the most unequivocal statement of this imperial idea of Byzantium can be found in Michael Psellos’s oration to Constantine IX Monomachos: “What the Creator is in relation to you, this you may be in relation to us.” Quoted in Maguire, “Heavenly Court,” 247 n. 2. For a modern translation and commentary of the panegyric, see S. Lüthi, “Michael Psellos, Panégyrique 1: Traduction princeps et commentaire,” *Byzantion* 77 (2007): 501–65.

Scholarship, particularly in the realm of Romano-Byzantine art, literature, and panegyrics, has long emphasized the importance of the idea of an emperor as the functional equivalent of the Christian God, who “dignified” and appointed the earthly ruler.⁸⁰ The same idea could also be heard among the acclamations shouted by the crowd and factions in the Hippodrome after the death of Leo I (r. 457–474): “Oh, Heavenly Emperor! Give us an earthly one!”⁸¹ In addition, none other than Constantine VII himself expresses the clear idea of the connection between earthly ceremonial and heavenly order in his preface to the *Book of Ceremonies*:

Perhaps this undertaking seems superfluous to others who do not have as great a concern for what is necessary, but it is particularly dear to us and highly desirable and more relevant than anything else because through praiseworthy ceremonies [ἐπαινετῆς τάξεως]⁸² the imperial

80 A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, 1968), 79, held that depictions of the heavenly court were based on similar images of the imperial family, and C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (New York, 1980), 151–58, likewise agreed that the heavenly court was conceived as a mirror of the Byzantine court. For the imperial image itself, see A. Grabar, *L’empereur dans l’art byzantin* (Paris, 1936); A. Walker, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.* (Cambridge, 2012); M. C. Carile, “Imperial Icons in Late Antiquity and Byzantium: The Iconic Image of the Emperor between Representation and Presence,” *Ikon* 9 (2016): 75–98; M. Studer-Karlen, “The Emperor’s Image in Byzantium: Perceptions and Functions,” in *Meanings and Functions of the Ruler’s Image in the Mediterranean World (11th–15th Centuries)*, ed. M. Bacci and M. Studer-Karlen (Leiden, 2022), 134–71. Contra, T. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 1999). More recently, K. Ringrose, *The Perfect Servant: Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago, 2003), 143, emphasized the bidirectional quality of this mirroring, asserting that “in a reciprocal way, patterns of visualizing heaven became the model for the Byzantine imperial court, and that each image reinforced the other.” Similarly, Maguire, “Heavenly Court,” 248, argued, “One court was an image of the other, but the mirror that did the reflecting was permeable; as in the case of Alice’s mirror, it was possible for characters to pass through and come out on the other side.”

81 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.92 (ed. Reiske, 419): βασιλεῦ οὐράνιε, δός ἡμῖν ἐπίγειον.

82 One may quibble with the translation of τάξις as “ceremony.” It has been argued that there is no specific Byzantine word used for “ceremony” / “ceremonial,” but I tend to disagree. Τάξις appears in the *Book of Ceremonies* in two subtly different ways. It is frequently employed in the primary sense of “arrangement” or “order,”

rule appears more beautiful and acquires more nobility and so is a cause of wonder to both foreigners and our own people. . . . The imperial power thus being conducted in measure and order, we shall depict the harmony and movement of the creator in relation to the whole, and it will appear to those subject to it to be more dignified and for this reason both sweeter and more wonderful.⁸³

Imperial ceremonial in general was thus religiously charged, reflecting the official, court-propagated ideology of the emperor as the vice regent of God. There are a number of distinct elements to the particular ceremony examined here, the audience ceremonial, that are

often in the context of describing the position of persons in their hierarchical ranks and topographical placement. It is also used, however, in a broader sense, akin to “ceremony”/“ceremonial” throughout the work (e.g., in conjunction with the liturgical “following”/“arrangement” (*άκολουθία*) in the heading at 1.1: Τάξις καὶ ἀκόλουθία τῶν . . . προελεύσεων). Though this expanded meaning has received little comment, translating *τάξις* as “ceremony” follows the humanist tradition, the source of the commonly used Latin title of the work, *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*, as well as Reiske’s proposed title, *Περὶ βασιλέου τάξεως*. Cf. the extended commentary on the term in Dagron and Flusin, *De ceremoniis*, 4.1:6–13. One may add that the middle Byzantine palace official in charge of ceremonial held the title of ὁ ἐπὶ τῆς καταστάσεως, and Dagron and Flusin, *De ceremoniis*, 4.1:476–79, convincingly argue that the lost treatise of Peter the Patrician was not entitled *Περὶ πολιτικῆς*, as the *Suda* entry (A. Adler, ed., *Suidae lexicon*, 5 vols. [Leipzig, 1928–38], 4.117) would have one believe, but rather *Σύνταγμα τῆς τοῦ παλατίου καταστάσεως*, based on a scholion to the *Basilika* (see *Basilicorum libri LX*, ed. H. J. Scheltema, N. van der Wal, and D. Holwerda [Groningen, 1988], B.VIII 2.1, no. 6). The formulation *πολιτείας κατάστασις*, found in Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle AM 6024* (ed. De Boor, 181–83) in his account of the debate between the imperial herald and the Greens (*Acta dia Kalopodion*) under Justinian, is best translated as “the ceremonies of the state” (hesitantly by Av. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* [Oxford, 1976], 252 and 320 n. 7, and without comment in C. Mango and R. Scott, trans., *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* [Oxford, 1997], 278).

83 *Book of Ceremonies* 1, preface (ed. Reiske, 3, 5): Ἀλλοις μέν τισιν ἵσιος ἔδοξεν ἀν τουτὶ τὸ ἐγχείρημα περιττὸν, οἵς οὐ τοσαύτῃ τῶν ἀναγκαίων φροντὶς, ἡμῖν δὲ καὶ λίαν φιλον καὶ περισπούδαστον καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων οἰκειότερον, ἦτε διὰ τῆς ἐπαινετῆς τάξεως τῆς βασιλέου ἀρχῆς δεικνυμένης κοσμιωτέρας καὶ πρὸς τὸ εὐσχημονέστερον ἀνατρεχούσης καὶ διὰ τοῦτο θαυμαστῆς οὖσης ἔθνεστί τε καὶ ἡμετέροις. . . . ὑφ’ ὧν τοῦ βασιλείου κράτους ῥυθμῷ καὶ τάξει φερομένου, εἰκονίζοιμεν τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τὴν περὶ τόδε τὸ πάν ἀρμονίαν καὶ κίνησιν, καθορότο δὲ καὶ τοῖς ὑπὸ χειρα σεμνοπρεπέστερον, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡδύτερόν τε καὶ θαυμαστότερον (trans. Moffatt and Tall, *Book of Ceremonies*, modified).

closely connected to the idea of an imperial Heavenly Jerusalem or the Heavenly Court and that allow one to understand the spectacle of the enthroned emperor as a spatial icon in his “other heaven.” They consist of the architectural setting of the audience and its décor; the synesthetic and symbolical elements of the appearance of the emperor himself; the dramatis personae of the bodyguards and courtiers. Each is examined taking into consideration the material and synesthetic, immaterial elements of the scene that constitute the imperial spatial icon—including specific sights and their visual effects, as well as the olfactory and acoustic impressions connected to the ceremony—and the most famous description of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, a passage that served as inspiration for various literary approaches to the earthly/heavenly palace:⁸⁴

And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates. . . . And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the walls of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. . . . And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.⁸⁵

84 Carile, *The Vision*, 173 n. 133.

85 Rev. 21:10–23: καὶ ἀπήγεγκέν με ἐν πνεύματι ἐπὶ ὅρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἀγίαν Ἱερουσαλήμ καταβαίνουσαν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἔχουσαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ, δὲ φωστήρ αὐτῆς ὅμοιος λιθῷ τιμιωτάτῳ ως λιθῷ ἴασπιδὶ κρυσταλλίζοντι. ἔχουσα τείχος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, ἔχουσα πυλῶνας δώδεκα . . . καὶ ἡ ἐνδώμησις τοῦ τείχους αὐτῆς ἱασπίς καὶ ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὅμοιον ὑάλῳ

The Good Place

While it is true that the notion of an intrinsic link between the imperial and the divine spheres is part and parcel of late antique and Byzantine political ideology, pervading almost all forms of public display of imperial power, a qualification must be added. This link focused on a specific location, the emperor's abode, the Great Palace—the most obvious place for it to be made visible and, indeed, where it could be experienced by means other than sight—the special topographical and symbolic focus of the connection between the earthly and the divine. The emperor, enthroned in majesty, awaited those to whom he had granted an audience in his "high seat" in the palace, just as God awaited the souls of the deceased in the Heavenly Jerusalem in order to judge them. As Maria Cristina Carile has argued, based on both written sources and iconographic material, the palace was intentionally conceptualized from an early stage as the equivalent of the Heavenly Jerusalem on

καθαρῷ. οἱ θεμέλιοι τοῦ τείχους τῆς πόλεως παντὶ λιθῷ τιμίῳ κεκοσμημένοι. ὁ θεμέλιος ὁ πρώτος ἵασπις, ὁ δεύτερος σάπφιρος, ὁ τρίτος χαλκηδών, ὁ τέταρτος σμάραγδος, ὁ πέμπτος σαρδόνυξ, ὁ ἕκτος σάρδιον, ὁ ἔβδομος χρυσόσλιθος, ὁ ὅγδοος βήρυλλος, ὁ ἔνατος τοπάζιον, ὁ δέκατος χρυσόπρασος, ὁ ἑνδέκατος ὑάκινθος, ὁ δωδέκατος ἀμέθυστος, καὶ οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες δώδεκα μαργαρῖται, ἀνὰ εἰς ἔκαστος τῶν πυλώνων ἦν ἐνὸς μαργαρίτου. καὶ ἡ πλατεία τῆς πόλεως χρυσίον καθαρὸν ὡς ὄντος διαγῆς. . . . καὶ ἡ πόλις οὐ χρείαν ἔχει τοῦ ἥλιου οὐδὲ τῆς σελήνης ἵνα φαίνωσιν αὐτῇ, ἡ γὰρ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν, καὶ ὁ λύχνος αὐτῆς τὸ ἀρνίον (trans. King James Version, hereafter KJV). The canonicity of the book of Revelation was disputed in late antiquity (e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25), particularly in the Greek-speaking East, and its canonical status in the Chalcedonian (modern Orthodox) Church was only finally cemented in the middle and late Byzantine eras. Particularly problematic in ideological terms was the strong anti-imperial slant of the text, written during a time of Christian persecution in the first century CE. As stated in S. J. Shoemaker, "The Afterlife of the Apocalypse of John in Byzantium," in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, ed. D. Krueger and R. S. Nelson (Washington, DC, 2016), 301–16, esp. at 306, "[S]uch ideas would be difficult to reconcile with the drastically changed political circumstances of the Byzantine period, when Rome and its emperors were no longer enemies of the church but instead had become (theoretically, at least) its pious and divinely appointed protectors." In terms of Lidov's image paradigm theory, however, the specific text of Revelation and the question of its acceptance or popularity need not be of concern here; image paradigms are not based on single, specific texts or archetypes, but on part of a continuum of ideas (Lidov, "Image-Paradigms"). Revelation may be the most well-known expression of the image paradigm of the Heavenly Jerusalem, but it was not the only one.

earth.⁸⁶ Analyzing literary concepts of the palace in works such as the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus of Panopolis and the same author's *Paraphrasis* of the Apocalypse of John, among others, she argues persuasively in favor of such a concept having general currency in late antiquity.⁸⁷ In quasi-official ideology, the palace "represented the bridge between the earthly and the heavenly realm" and was "conceived as an epitome of the heavenly kingdom,"⁸⁸ a sentiment echoed, among others, by John Chrysostom: "Yes, for the city [the Heavenly Jerusalem] is most kingly and glorious; not as the cities with us, divided into a marketplace, and the royal courts; for there all is the court of the King."⁸⁹

Carile's argument cannot be reproduced in detail here, but there can be little doubt of an increasing hieratization of the palace and the emperor in the centuries after Justinian, including both an increasing discursive parallelization of the emperor and Christ himself and ritual emphasis on this idea in ceremonial.⁹⁰ Carile notes,

Therefore, the palace, as the privileged setting for the manifestation of the emperor with his court, ultimately reproduced on earth the heavenly model for the imperial court, the kingdom of God. In this representative system, as the

⁸⁶ Carile, *The Vision*; Carile, "Imperial Palaces"; and for shorter elaborations on the same theme, Carile, "The Imperial Palace Glittering with Light: The Material and Immaterial in the Sacrum Palatum," in *Hierotopy of Light and Fire in the Culture of the Byzantine World*, ed. A. Lidov (Moscow, 2013), 105–35.

⁸⁷ Carile, *The Vision*, 27–48. Conversely, in the seventh century *Life of Martha*, mother of Symeon the Styliste the Younger, the Heavenly Jerusalem is a "succession of ever more luxurious palaces at ever higher levels of Paradise" (Savage, "Building Heavenly Jerusalem," 72, and also see *passim*; cf. *La Vie de sainte Marthe mère de S. Syméon stylite le Jeune* 16–18, in P. van den Ven, ed., *La vie ancienne de S. Syméon Stylite le Jeune* [521–592] [Brussels, 1970], 2:265–67). In the fourth century Coptic *Life of Apa Matthaeus the Poor*, Heavenly Jerusalem appears as a palace with gates and halls (cf. Carile, *The Vision*, 43, with n. 101; for the text, see W. C. Till, ed., *Koptische Heiligen- und Märtyrerlegenden*, vol. 2 [Rome, 1936], 5–27). In Byzantine tradition, the Kingdom of Heaven, imagined as a Heavenly Jerusalem, was an "improved, purified, and infinitely successful version of the Basileus's earthly kingdom": P. Alexander, "The Strength of Empire and Capital as Seen through Byzantine Eyes," *Speculum* 37 (1962): 339–57, at 344.

⁸⁸ Carile, *The Vision*, 24; 25.

⁸⁹ John Chrysostom, *Homily in Matthew* 1.71 (PG 57:23): Καὶ γάρ ἔστι βασιλικωτάτη ἡ πόλις καὶ περιφανῆς οὐχ ὡσπερ οἱ παρ' ἡμῖν, εἰς ἀγορὰν καὶ βασιλεια διηρημένη· ἀλλὰ πάντα βασιλεια τὰ ἔχει.

⁹⁰ Carile, *The Vision*, 171–75.

earthly order reproduced the heavenly order, so too did the palace with its architecture and decoration reproduce the heavenly kingdom of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, on earth.⁹¹

While the parallelization reached its logical extremes only in later centuries, the essential elements, both architectural and decorative as well as ceremonial, were already in place in the sixth century.⁹² Mischa Meier, following on a remark by Averil Cameron, called this process “liturgification.”⁹³ The sacralization of the emperor, he argued, was an epiphenomenon of this process, a “heightened religious charging and semantization of all socially relevant spheres” that was particularly actively pursued under Justinian but also played a role as early as the fifth century, such as in the emphasized ceremonial piety of emperors, among them Arcadius and Theodosius II.⁹⁴ In the seventh-century *Tales of Anastasius of Sinai*, a dead emperor’s ascension to heaven is imagined as a procession into an imperial palace.⁹⁵ It is thus hardly surprising that the emperor’s house also had to undergo a corresponding sacralization, which, moreover, it had already had *in nuce* since the beginning of the emperorship. This included infusing the architecture of the palace with religious motifs, the construction of chapels and churches, *inter alia*, to

house the ever-growing collection of precious relics on the palace grounds.⁹⁶

Carile contends that parts of the architecture and decoration of Constantinople’s Great Palace may have been consciously modeled to evoke a heavenly image based on her analysis of visual depictions of imperial and heavenly palaces in places such as the Thessaloniki Rotunda, the apse mosaic of Santa Pudenziana in Rome, and the mosaics of Sant’Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna and also on her readings of descriptions of the palace in Constantinople. She asserts that the glittering, shining quality of palace architecture, a ubiquitous trope in the sources, was a material reality rather than a mere literary convention.⁹⁷ Some buildings, including the Chalkē, the Consistory, and later the Chrysotriklinos, were all furnished with polished roof tiles of gold or gilded bronze in a conscious effort to make the palace appear in an almost supernatural light.⁹⁸ The roofs reflected a bright, golden light to transform the palace into a highly visible beacon during the day and, possibly, during the night as well, when moonlight or the light from the nearby lighthouse would be reflected.⁹⁹ Pervasive mosaic decorations, burnished marble revetments, and exterior water pools and fountains would have lent daylight in the palace courts that glittering or rippling quality of which so many of our sources speak. The same effect was pursued with interior decoration schemes. We know for instance that the Hall of Nineteen Couches had a gilded ceiling after the renovations of Constantine VII and there is reason to

91 Carile, *The Vision*, 176.

92 For instance, a new iconographic program in the audience hall of the Chrysotriklinos, executed under Michael III (r. 842–867), made the parallelization of the earthly and heavenly courts explicit: a mosaic of Christ hovered directly over the imperial throne, “visually conveying the power of the earthly *basileia* as derived from God and his protection of the Christian emperor”: Carile, “Glittering with Light,” 175.

93 M. Meier, “Liturgification and Hyper-Sacralization: The Declining Importance of Imperial Piety in Constantinople between the 6th and 7th Centuries A.D.,” in *The Body of the King: The Staging of the Body of the Institutional Leader from Antiquity to Middle Ages in East and West. Proceedings of the Meeting Held in Padova, July 6th–9th, 2011*, ed. G. B. Lanfranchi and R. Rollinger (Padova, 2016), 227–46.

94 C. Kelly, “Stooping to Conquer: The Power of Imperial Humility,” in *Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity*, ed. C. Kelly (Cambridge, 2013), 221–43.

95 Anastasius of Sinai, *Tales* 2.2.4 (A. Bingeli, ed., “Anastase le Sinaïte: ‘Récits sur le Sinaï’ et ‘Récits utiles à l’âme’: édition, traduction, commentaire” [PhD diss., Paris IV, 2001], 1:255); see P. Booth, “The Ghost of Maurice at the Court of Heraclius,” *BZ* 112 (2019): 781–826, esp. 817–18.

96 Cf. Carile, *The Vision*, 171–73.

97 Carile, “Glittering with Light”; M. C. Carile, “Metafore di luce nelle architetture e nel decoro da Costantino a Costanzo II,” in *L’impero costantiniano e i luoghi sacri*, ed. T. Canella (Bologna, 2016), 461–90.

98 Cf. Carile, “Glittering with Light,” esp. 106–15. For the Chalkē Gate, see C. Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen, 1959), and cf. *Anth. Graec.* 9.656: αὐτὸς ἐκὸς στηπτοῦχος Ἰσαυροφόνοι μετὰ νίκην / χρυσοφάες μ’ ἐτέλεστεν ἐδέθλιον Ἡριγενεῖς, / πάντῃ τετραπόρων ἀνέει μων πεπετασμένον αὔραις, and W. R. Paton, trans., *The Greek Anthology*, vol. 3 (London, 1917), 365: “My Prince [sc. the emperor Anastasius] himself, after his victory over the Saurians, completed me, the House of the Dawn [sc. the Chalkē], shining with gold, on all sides exposed to the breezes of the four winds.”

99 It is unclear when the lighthouse, the Pharos of Constantinople, was built. What is known is that a church of the Pharos was renovated after the iconoclastic period, which indicates that it existed at the least at the beginning of the eighth century.

think that this was the case earlier as well.¹⁰⁰ Similar gilded ceiling decorations are attested in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* and in Claudius Mamertinus's *Speech of Thanks to Julian*.¹⁰¹ Flavius Merobaudes, in his fifth-century *Carmina*, composed under Valentinian III and surviving only in a fragmentary state, describes a glittering image of the imperial couple executed in mosaics on the ceiling of the Ravenna palace, combining the ideologeme of the luminescent emperor with the sensual impression of an extant artwork:

Harmony of the table portrayed hovers over the doors, as does the sacred pair of the imperial house, where festive guests carry on eternal banquets and the royal couches are resplendent with purple coverlets. The Emperor himself in full splendor occupies with his wife the center of the ceiling, as if they were the bright stars of the heavens on high. . . . The court flourishes, after obtaining its master's beautiful offspring, and the ceiling itself, set on fire by the chariot of Phoebus and the purple of the Emperor, shines with youthful light and holds united the stars of heaven and earth.¹⁰²

The notion of the architecture of the Great Palace expressing “the idea of a heavenly palace on earth” is also found throughout Corippus's panegyric, whether by the analogy of the palace as “another heaven,” as already noted, or as “Olympus.”¹⁰³ Beyond describing the pure architecture of the palace itself, Corippus dwells on its lavish decorations to make his point. He highlights the effects of lighting and reflections throughout the palace with a particular intensity; the Consistory itself “shines

¹⁰⁰ Theophanes Continuatus, *Chronographia* 6.20 (I. Bekker, ed., *Theophanes Continuatus, Chronographia*, CSHB [Bonn, 1838], 449).

¹⁰¹ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 3.49; *Pan. Lat.* III (11) 11.4.

¹⁰² F. Merobaudes, *Carmina* 1.1–6: *incumbit foribus pictae Concordia mensae, / purpureique sacer sexus uterque laris, / aeternas ubi festa dapes convivia gestant, / purpureisque nitent regia fulcra toris. / ipse micans tecti medium cum coniuge princeps / lucida cœu summi possidet astra poli;* 2.1–4: *silva viret, pulchram domini sortita iuuentam, / ipsaque primaevo lumine tecta nitent, / quae Foebi flammatæ rotis et principis ostro / aetheris ac terrae sidera mixta tenant* (F. Clover, ed. and trans., “Flavius Merobaudes: A Translation and Historical Commentary,” *TAPA*, n.s., 61 [1971]: 1–78, at 11). On Merobaudes, perhaps a descendant of the fourth-century *magister militum* of the same name, see *PLRE* 1,598–99 (Merobaudes 2).

¹⁰³ Carile, *The Vision*, 173.

with sunlight reflected by the surfaces” (*sole metallorum splendentia*).¹⁰⁴ It is this light symbolism that turns the palace into a supernatural place: “The imperial palace with its officials is like Olympus. Everything is as bright, everything as well ordered in its numbers, as shining with light.”¹⁰⁵

The most obvious parallel with the Heavenly Jerusalem, however, is that the palace shines of its own accord, by its own brilliance, without the need for an actual light source: “There is a hall deep inside the higher part of the building, shining with its own light as though exposed to the open sky, brilliant with the bright shine of glassy metal. If one can say so, it does not need the yellow sun, or else it should be called the room of the sun.”¹⁰⁶

This idea of a place that does not need sunlight because it is illuminated by the divine is appropriated straight from the book of Revelation: the Heavenly Jerusalem needs neither sun nor moon, as the light of God illuminates it.¹⁰⁷ In Constantinople, however, it is not God himself who provides supernatural light, but his representative and functional equivalent on earth: the emperor. This is a well-worn theme in later Byzantine imperial discourse, but already quite developed in late antiquity.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.191–93: *Atria praelargis extant altissima tectis, / sole metallorum splendentia, mira paratu, / et facie plus mira loci, cultuque superba.*

¹⁰⁵ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.179–81: *Imitatur Olympum / officiis augusta domus: sic omnia clara, / sic numeris bene comptæ suis, ita luce corusca* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*). Cf. E. Dimitriadou, “From the Great Palace to the Great Church: Art and Light in the Context of Court Ritual in Tenth-Century Constantinople,” in Lidov, *Hierotopy of Light and Fire*, 147–58. See also Carile, “Glittering with Light,” 174: “Everything from the wall decoration to the guards’ apparel shines of gold in the throne room, the light being one of the greatest and pervasive features of the whole scene.”

¹⁰⁶ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 1.97–101: *Est domus interior, tectorum in parte superna, / luce sua radians, ut aperto libera caelo, / conspicuo vitrei splendens fulgore metalli. / Dicere si fas est, rutili non indiga solis / vel solis dicenda domus* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

¹⁰⁷ This is a common idea associated with divinity, as shown, for example, by the inscription of Pope Felix IV below the apse mosaic of the church of Cosma and Damian in Rome: *aula dei claris radiato speciosa metallis / in qua plus fidei lux pretiosa micat* (*ILCV* 1784.1).

¹⁰⁸ Cf. H. P. L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Oslo, 1953); Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, 67–71; E. H. Kantorowicz, “Oriens Augusti: Lever du Roi,” *DOP* 17 (1963): 117–77; H. Hunger, *Prooimion: Elemente der byzantinischen Kaiseridee in den Arengen der Urkunden* (Vienna, 1964), 75–80;

Here Comes the Sun

Corippus describes the person of the emperor, as well as his clothes and the objects associated with him, as imbued with a supernatural luminance. Consider, for instance, the passage describing Justin changing into the imperial costume shortly before his formal accession:

The emperor himself took off his former clothing and stood dressed only in one garment and increased the light with his royal limbs. Like when the dense cloud begins to part and the pure air shows the clear sky, the sun sends out blazing rays and all the elements rejoice together at the sight of the day. . . . He stepped out and clothed his pious limbs in a tunic, covering himself with a gilded robe in which he shone out, white all over, and gave off light and dispersed the dusky shadows though the light from the heavens had not yet fully appeared. His calves resound with the shining purple boot. . . . A shining girdle, bright with noble gems and worked gold, encircled the royal loins. . . . The *chlamys*, which was adorned with tawny gold and outdid the sun as the emperor stretched out his right hand, covered the imperial shoulders in glowing purple.¹⁰⁹

Similar light references always accompany the appearance of the emperor. For instance, when Justin entered the Consistory for his audience with the Avars, Corippus prefaces his physical appearance with “a

M. Parani, “Rise Like the Sun, the God-Inspired Kingship’: Light-Symbolism and the Uses of Light in Middle and Late Byzantine Imperial Ceremonials,” in Lidov, *Hierotopy of Light and Fire*, 159–84, esp. 159: “The metaphor of the Byzantine emperor as the sun, bringing warmth and light to his subjects and destructive fire to the empire’s enemies, was a constant in the rhetoric of the Byzantine imperial idea.”

109 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 2.89–120: *Cultu ipse priore / exiit, tantumque uno vestitus amictu / constituit et lumen membris regalibus auxit. / Haud secus ut, nubes cum se rescindere densa / coepit et caelum monstraverit aethra serenum, / ardentes radios mittit iubar. . . . Ereditur tunicaque piis inducitur artus, / aurata se veste tegens, qua candidus omnis / eniuit lumenque dedit fuscasque removit / aetherea nondum prolata luce tenebras. / Purpureo surae resonant fulgente cothurno, / . . . Nobilibus gemmis et cocto lucidus auro / balteus effulgens lumbos praecinxit heriles, / . . . Caesareos umeros ardentem murice texit / circumfusa chlamys, rutilo quae ornata metallo / principis exerta vincebat lumina dextra* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

glorious light [that] shone from the inner chamber and filled all the meeting place.”¹¹⁰ When he appears in the Hippodrome, he is depicted as stepping out “with his own light” (*cum luce sua*).¹¹¹ The inner light of the divinely legitimized emperor is even transferred to his seat in the description of his consular procession, namely, to the magnificent *sella curulis*, decorated with gold and precious stones, which even without the sun had a “light of its own.”¹¹² Finally, during Justin’s subsequent elevation on a shield, the emperor appears to Corippus as another sun rising in the palace; an imperial light now shone from the city and in one day two suns had risen.¹¹³ The simile of the emperor as imperial sun is also found in Merobaudes’ *Carmina*; here, too, the imperial couple occupy the place of the “bright stars of the heavens.” Pointedly, however, whereas the emperor is the sun, resplendent with his own light, his relatives only mirror that luminescence: “When his sister stands nearby, you would think that the shining luminary of the bright moon is glittering with her brother’s light.”¹¹⁴ Both the ideological conceit and literary device of equating the emperor with light and the sun (or a solar deity), going back to earlier imperial and Hellenistic antecedents, were well established by the sixth century

110 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.211–12: *adytis radiavit ab imis / inclita lux et consistoria tota replevit* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

111 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 2.299 (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

112 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 4.115–16: *extabat sedes, auro gemmisque superba, / lumen habens sine sole suum* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

113 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 2.148–50: *Astitit in clipeo princeps fortissimus illo / solis habens speciem: lux altera fulsit ab urbe. / Mirata est pariter geminos consurgere soles.* The trope of the emperor as a new sun is already well established in late antiquity: Eusebius, *De laudibus Constantini* 3.4; *Pan. Lat. II* (12) 21.5; Synesius, *On Royalty* 16.6, 26.1 (ed. Lamoureux); and Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 2.137–58 and passim (esp. 2.149: *solis habens speciem*). Solar ideology had already begun to play an increasingly large role in imperial ideology by the third century, with Sol first appearing as a companion on coinage of the emperor Probus; e.g., *RIC V Probus* 138: SOLI INVICTO COMITI, a slogan later also adopted by Constantine (cf. *RIC VII Sirmium* 31). For later examples of imperial sun ideology in Byzantine literature, see Hunger, *Proiomion*, 75–80.

114 Merobaudes, *Carmina* 1.12–14 (ed. Clover): *cum soror adsistis, nitidae candentiae Lunae / sidera fraterna luce micare putis.* The sibling in question is Honoria, sister to Valentinian III and daughter to Galla Placidia.

and would see their ultimate apogee in later centuries.¹¹⁵ Although Merobaudes and Corippus's verses are thoroughly ideologized texts, which must be read with the necessary critical distance, there is no reason to think that the light symbolism described was a purely stylistic device of the panegyrist, rather than a reflection of actual ceremonial practices. It is doubtful, certainly, whether the imperial limbs really shone with the grace and power of the sun. It is safe, however, to assume that the masters of the imperial ceremonial and of the architecture and furnishings of the imperial palace made efforts to adapt visual and tactile elements of the palace in such a way as to evoke precisely that symbolism of light. This is well established for individual imperial ceremonies in late antiquity as well as in Byzantine times. The appearance of the emperor during the chariot races in the Hippodrome, for instance, was requested and

¹¹⁵ Earlier examples include Caligula and Nero adopting the title or being called New Helios (Νέος Ἡλίος): for Caligula, *IGRRP²* IV 145 = *SIG II* 798; Nero, *IG VII* 2713, line 35, *IGRRP²* III 345; cf. Alföldi, *Monarchische Repräsentation*, 60, 225–26, 257–63, on the officially propagated solar cult of late third-century emperors, including Aurelian, and J. Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2012), 42–125, on the attribution of a salvific luminosity of tetrarchic and Constantinian rulers in panegyrics. On solar elements in Constantinian ideology, see also I. Tantillo, "Attributi solari della figura imperial in Eusebio di Cesarea," *Mediterraneo antico* 6 (2003): 41–59; I. Tantillo, "L'impero della luce: Riflessioni su Costantino e il sole," *MÉFRA* 115 (2003): 985–1048. Cf. Kantorowicz, "Oriens Augusti," 151: "The sun-kingship of the Byzantine emperors, therefore, was not only a residuum of Hellenistic-Roman tradition but also a reflection of the sun-kingship as represented by the Christian God." In middle Byzantine imperial ideology, the parallelism between emperor and sun was even more pronounced; e.g., Michael Psellos's panegyric to Constantine Monomachos (*Oration to Constantine Monomachos* 1.1, E. Kurtz and F. Drexel, eds., *Michaelis Pselli scripta minora*, vol. 1 [Milan, 1936], 31), opens with the striking (and multifaceted) appellation "Sun-King!" (Ὄ θεστὶλευ ἥλιε). The sun metaphor is the dominant element of the entire speech: see, e.g., lines 21, 56–57, 60–62, 99, 179, and the commentary by Lüthi, "Panégyrique," 517–24, who notes (p. 519) that the term is steeped in neo-Platonic philosophical implications as it is also the name for the highest divinity (Βασιλεὺς Ἡλίος or Ἡλίος Βασιλεὺς) in neo-Platonic thought (as, e.g., in Julian's *Hymn to King Helios*). To name but two of a plethora of possible examples, similar appellations are later used in addressing John Komnenos, such as those by Theodoros Prodromos, *Poemata* 1.1, 4.32–33, 9.21, 10.1 (W. Hörandner, ed., *Theodoros Prodromos: Historische Gedichte, Text und Kommentar*, Wiener Byzantinische Studien 11 [Vienna, 1974]), and those used by Eustathius of Thessalonica in orations for Manuel Komnenos (E. Regel, ed., *Fontes rerum byzantinarum* I/1 [St. Petersburg, 1892], or. 1, p. 14, lines 8–18; or. 6, p. 121, lines 19–122; cf. Hunger, *Neuen Mitte*, 97–103).

accompanied by a prescribed set of acclamations that revolved around the exhortation Ἀνάτειλον! ("Rise up!"), an expression as closely connected to sunrise or the rise of stars as the Hippodrome was to solar cosmography.¹¹⁶ Similarly, the palace was situated in a symbolic urban topography and closely associated with the imperial sun and the heavenly realm. Both the literary light symbolism and the actual lighting design and gold mosaics of imperial representational spaces are meant to evoke religious associations with the celestial realm, as Corippus explicitly states: "There are two wonderful things imitating the glorious sky, founded by the advice of God, the venerable temple and the glorious building of the new Sophianae. This is the hall of the emperor and this is of God."¹¹⁷

This parallelization of imperial palace and great church is all the more striking for two reasons. First, Hagia Sophia was commonly understood and described

¹¹⁶ *Book of Ceremonies* 1.68 (ed. Reiske, 316). See Rollinger, *Zeremoniell und Herrschaft*, chap. 9, and G. Dagron, "L'organisation et le déroulement des courses d'après le Livre des Cérémonies," *TM* 13 (2000): 3–200, for the ceremonies and preparations associated with the chariot races. On the cosmic symbolism of the Hippodrome, see also G. Vespiagnani, *Simbolismo magia e sacralità dello spazio circo* (Bologna, 1994); G. Vespiagnani, *ΠΙΠΙΟΔΡΟΜΟΣ: Il circo di Costantinopoli nuova Roma. Dalla realtà alla storiografia* (Spoleto, 2010), 67–136, and 189–248, for circus ceremonies. There is reason to think that after the disappearance of chariot races, the later Komnenian ceremony of *prokypsis* developed at least in part to replace this important element of imperial ceremonial. On the *prokypsis*, designed around light symbolism and practical lighting effects, see Pseudo-Kodinos, *On the Offices* 7.97 (J. Macrides, J. A. Munitiz, and D. Angelov, eds., *Pseudo-Kodinos and the Constantinopolitan Court: Offices and Ceremonies* [Farnham, 2013], 234–37). Cf. L'Orange, *Studies*, 110–14; Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, 67–70, 112–23; M. Jeffreys, "The Comnenian Prokypsis," *Parergon* 5 (1987): 38–53.

¹¹⁷ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 4.285–88: *inclita praeclarum duo sunt imitantia caelum, consilio fundata Dei, venerabile templum / et Sophianarum splendentia tecta novarum. / Principis haec, haec aula Dei* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*). In later centuries, the complex interplay of solar political ideology and imperial christomimesis would be strikingly expressed in a poem by Theodoros Prodromos (*Poemata* 10.c.1–6, ed. W. Hörandner): Φωτίζου, πόλις Ρωμαΐς, πάλιν ἐρῶ· φωτίζου, / διπλαῖς αὐγάζου ταῖς αὐγαῖς ἐκ δύο τῶν ἥλιων. / ἔχεις ἐκείθεν ἥλιον τὸν τῆς δικαιοσύνης, / τό τοῦ πατρὸς ἀπαύγασμα γυμνὸν ἐν Ιορδάνῃ, / ἔχεις ἐντεῦθεν ἥλιον τὸν τῆς μονοκρατίας, / τὸν τοῦ πατρὸς διάδοχον λαμπρὸν ἐν ἀνακτόροις (Shine, Roman city, again I say: shine! Shine in the double brilliance of both suns! From thence you have the Sun of Justice, the Father's naked reflection in the Jordan; and from thence you have the Sun of Monarchy, the successor of the father, brilliant in the palace!). On the "Sun of Justice" as a common circumscriptio of Christ, see Lüthi, "Panégyrique," 521.

as mimicking the heavenly spheres in its architecture and aesthetics. For instance, in a contemporary kontakion, “On the earthquake and arson,” composed after the Nika riots and to celebrate the construction of Justinian’s Hagia Sophia, Romanos Melodos expresses this in no uncertain terms: “The building of the church itself was built with such artfulness that it imitates heaven, the Divine Throne, which offers eternal life.”¹¹⁸ Second, the palace that Corippus refers to as Sophianae is not the Great Palace, but an imperial resort on the Asian side of the Bosphorus built by Justin II and occupied by him and his consort, Sophia, before their accession.¹¹⁹ The passage thus suggests that the quasi-divine luminosity was not only associated with the Great Palace, but also with imperial palaces in general, or rather, with any building or place housing the emperor. After all, it was he who illuminated the house and not the other way around.

How was this light symbolism and solar ideology aided and furthered by actual ceremonial elements? For one, the imperial costume and insignia of late antiquity would have lent themselves to comparisons with bright stars and suns; emperors were after all clad in striking dress. When Corippus describes the imperial chlamys as “adorned with tawny gold” and that it “outdid the sun,” it was no literary trope but a fairly accurate description.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Romanos Melodos, *Hymns* 54.23.7–10 (J. Grosdidier de Matons, ed., *Romanos le Mélode: Hymnes*, SC 283, vol. 5 [Paris, 1981]): ὁ οἰκος δὲ αὐτός ὁ τῆς ἐκκλησίας / ἐν τοσαύτῃ ἀρετῇ οἰκοδομεῖται, / ὡς τὸν οὐρανὸν μιμεῖσθαι, τὸν θεῖον θρόνον, / δειπνοὶ παρέχει ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον). On the kontakion (and the question of which earthquake is alluded to in the title), see the commentary in Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode*, 455–59. Note that the “heavenly” aspects of Hagia Sophia are (e.g., in Procopius or Paul the Silentary) always connected with the subtle choreography of lighting effects, which again recalls the description of the Heavenly Jerusalem as a place of transcendent brightness. Cf. *inter alia* N. Isar, “‘Χορός of Light’: Vision of the Sacred in Paulus the Silentary’s Poem *Descriptio S. Sophia*,” *ByzF* 28 (2004): 215–42, and N. Schibille, *Hagia Sophia and the Byzantine Aesthetic Experience* (Farnham, 2014). For the importance of the church’s aural characteristics in creating an otherworldly impression, see B. Pentcheva, “Hagia Sophia and Multisensory Aesthetics,” *Gesta* 50 (2011): 93–111, and B. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, PA, 2017).

¹¹⁹ It was there that they were informed of Justinian’s passing. On the identification of the Sophianae, see Av. Cameron, “Notes on the Sophianae, the Sophianae and the Harbour of Sophia,” *Byzantion* 37 (1967): 11–20.

¹²⁰ Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 2.119–20: *chlamys, rutilo quae ornata metallo / principis exerta vincebat lumina dextra*.

According to all extant late antique sources, Diocletian had been the first emperor to introduce bejeweled costume and footwear, in the late third century, and subsequent emperors only added to this imperial costume.¹²¹ The expensive silken tunics and chlamydes of the emperor teemed with golden thread, the chlamys held fast at the right shoulder by a precious fibula with pearl *pendilia*. The diadem, probably introduced as a decorated purple band by Constantine, had developed into a jewel-encrusted, pearl-studded crown with double pendilia hanging on both sides of the face, as famously illustrated by the Justinian mosaics in Ravenna (Fig. 1).¹²² The luxurious, almost decadent splendor of the imperial costume is mostly glossed over by scholars—or, alternatively, criticized as an aberration from earlier models of emperorship during the Principate—but it is worth dwelling on. Jennifer Ball has rightly pointed out the heaviness and impracticality of such dress—yards of fabric, bejeweled, and impealed from head to foot in addition to jeweled footwear and a heavy diadem more crown than headband—but the trade-off held great symbolic and ideological value.¹²³ The bright purple dye, prohibitively expensive and legally restricted to the emperor and his family, screamed “Imperial!”; the silks, gemstones, and pearls represented *emolumenta imperii*, originating from every corner of the Roman world (and beyond); the jewels themselves possessed an ideological charge and were imbued in the Roman and Byzantine imaginaire with apotropaic powers, medical properties, and divine-imperial connotations.¹²⁴ Closer to the point

¹²¹ Eutr. 9.26; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.2; Zonar. 12.31. See Rollinger, “These Boots,” for a recent study of Diocletian’s role and purpose in such ceremonial innovations and for earlier literature. For later costumes, see, e.g., Symm. *Or.* 2.1.

¹²² Later centuries would see the culmination of these trends in the ever-richer, ever-heavier garments of the middle Byzantine court. Cf. J. L. Ball, *Byzantine Dress: Representations of Secular Dress in Eighth-to Twelfth-Century Painting* (New York, 2005), 11–36.

¹²³ Ball, *Byzantine Dress*, on the late antique, early Byzantine *loros*, the triumphal dress of the emperor: “Typically, the gemstones on a *loros* formed a grid of, on average, twelve rows of two large, square gemstones bordered with pearls. In one instance, representations attest to a *loros* with sixteen rows of four gemstones per row” (pp. 14–15), and “Between the *loros*, *stemma*, and *tzangia* the imperial couple not only carried all the empire’s wealth on their shoulders but they also radiated the healthy blessings that these gems offered” (p. 15).

¹²⁴ Cf. Michael Psellos, *Power of Stones* (J. M. Duffy, ed., *Michael Pselli Philosophica Minora: Concerning the Power of Stones*, vol. 1 [Leipzig, 1992]).

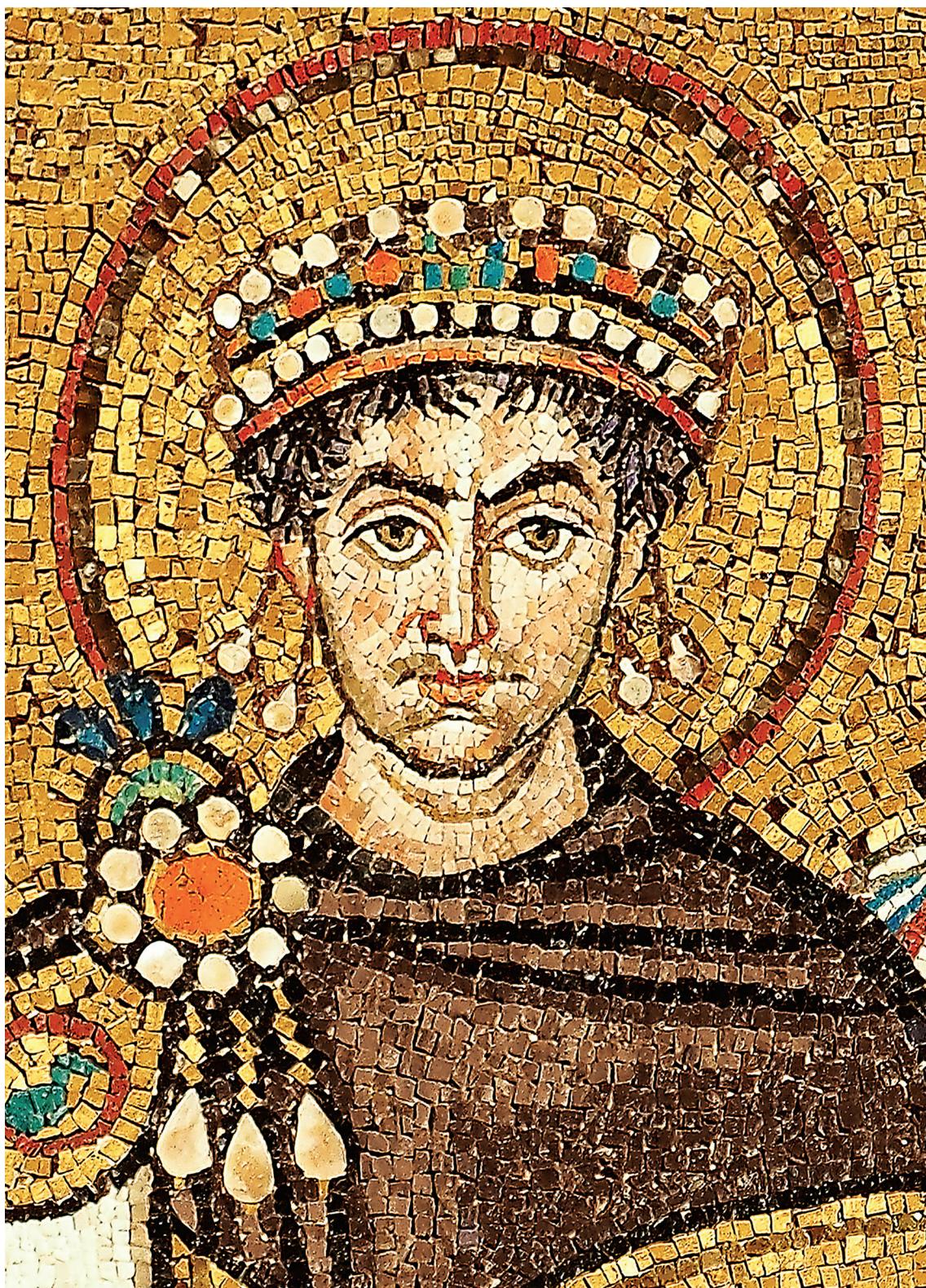


Fig. 1. Detail, Justinian, San Vitale, Ravenna, sixth century. Photo by Petar Milošević; courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

of Corippus's sun allegory, the effect produced by these garments would have been a glittering, sparkling, almost otherworldly figure, the imperial person rippling with reflected light at every movement, both in sunlight and in the more ethereal light of candles and lamps.

During ceremonies in the Great Palace, this effect would have been reinforced by the choreography of light design and the decorative program of the ceremonial rooms. Maria Parani has studied the use of physical lighting fixtures and their effect on ceremonial for the middle Byzantine period, but unfortunately, less is known about the interior of the Great Palace in late antiquity.¹²⁵ From a chapter in the *Book of Ceremonies* describing the preparations and procedures for tenth-century audiences, for instance, one learns that much care was taken in the maintenance and use of *polykandela* and other multi-light devices.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the ninth-century *Kletoorologion* of Philotheos, which provides a list of palace offices and titles as well as rules of precedence, mentions a special corps of lamplighters (*κανδηλάται*) assigned to the throne room (at the time the Chrysotriklinos).¹²⁷ These are likely connected with the earlier *lampadarii*, who accompanied the emperor and other high officials during public appearances and surrounded him with various light sources, as there seems to have been a special category of "imperial lights."¹²⁸ There are scant equivalent sources for late antiquity, but it is hard to see that things would have changed fundamentally between the fourth and ninth centuries. The light fixtures used would have been more or less the same—silver and gold *polykandela* and oil lamps—and thus a need for a corps of lamplighters then as well.

125 M. Parani, "Look Like an Angel: The Attire of Eunuchs and Its Significance within the Context of Middle Byzantine Court Ceremonial," in *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou, and M. Parani (Leiden, 2013), 433–63.

126 *Book of Ceremonies* 2.15 (ed. Reiske, 570–73).

127 Philotheos, *Kletoorologion* 131 (ed. Oikonomidés). Cf. Parani, *Look Like an Angel*, 161.

128 A. Hug, "Lampadarius," *RE* 12.1:569, and cf. Alföldi, *Monarchische Repräsentation*, 111–18. *Chron. Pasch.* ad a. 363 (ed. Dindorf, 551), recounts that the cubicularii of Emperor Julian hastened to the emperor's side "with the imperial lamps" (*μετὰ λαμπάδων βασιλικῶν*) when he was awakened by an ominous vision during his Persian campaign. Cf. John Malalas, *Chronicle* 13.23 (ed. Thurn, 256).

Corippus also states, albeit without details, that the Great Palace was specially decorated on ceremonial occasions.¹²⁹ The splendor of the Constantinopolitan palace is richly attested, however, in the other sources and reflected in surviving evidence from aristocratic domus and other palatial residences: the walls, floors, and roofs were decorated with such precious metals as silver and gold, but also burnished bronze, glass tesserae, and a variety of different marbles, each with their own hue and assembled in intricate geometric patterns or floral elements. Columns were adorned with pearls, jewels, or glass paste, everything "as bright . . . as shining with light" (*sic omnia clara . . . ita luca corusca*), replicating the heavenly equivalent.¹³⁰ As for the rest of the furnishings, one is unfortunately left with conjecture and educated guesses. Not only is Corippus mostly silent on this, so are the chapters ascribed to Peter the Patrician in the *Book of Ceremonies*. That reduces the available options to mining later chapters written about audiences in the Magnaura of the tenth century but again while being mindful that these later circumstances cannot be unreservedly applied to the sixth century. It is fair, however, to assume some general parallels in terms of structural similarities. If the later chapters list carpets, embroidered and unembroidered silk curtains, special robes, chandeliers, and other ornaments of gold, silver, enamel, bronze among the necessary objects and decorations for the audiences, there would appear to be no reason to consider it much different from in earlier

129 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.157: *ornata est augusta domus*.

130 See the studies collected in V. Ruppénié, ed., *Stone and Splendor: Interior Decorations in Late-Antique Palaces and Villas. Proceedings of a Workshop, Trier, 25–26 April 2019* (Wiesbaden, 2021). Echoes of such splendor survived from late antiquity into the thirteenth century, when the Frankish despoilers of Byzantium broke into its palaces, specifically the already much-reduced and smaller (compared to the Great Palace) Palace of Boukoleon, and found no better mode to describe them than one that again recalls the biblical archetype: "Within this palace . . . there were fully five hundred halls, all connected with one another and all made with gold mosaic. And in it there was one of them which was called the Holy Chapel, which was so rich and noble that there was not a hinge nor a band nor any other part such as usually made of iron that was not all of silver, and there was no column that was not of jasper or porphyry or some other rich precious stone. And the pavement of this chapel was of a white marble so smooth and clear that it seemed to be of crystal" (E. H. McNeal, ed. and trans., *The Conquest of Constantinople: Robert of Clari* [New York, 2005], chap. 82). On the Palace of Boukoleon, see C. Mango, "The Palace of Boukoleon," *Cah. Arch* 45 (1997): 41–50.

times. Similarly, there is no a priori reason to doubt the likelihood of wall decorations (flower garlands and laurel wreaths) or the sprinkling of floors with ivy and laurel, myrtle, and rosemary or rose water as attested in the *Book of Ceremonies*.¹³¹ The text is precise on these points in its contemporary context, down to prescribing exactly what shape the laurel wreaths and flower garlands must take, which floors should be sprinkled with laurel, which with rosemary, what kind and color of curtains should be hung in which corridors and rooms. Although it is unlikely that the precise arrangements remained unchanged after four centuries, it cannot be doubted that sixth-century ceremonial would have also involved a clean, sweet-smelling, heavily decorated and brightly lit palace.

Next to nothing is known about the architectural decoration of the Consistory. Corippus does mention in passing that the floor was richly decorated with mosaics (*pavimentum*), though more likely with multicolored marble slabs, as *pavimentum* may mean both, and covered with luxurious carpets, into which precious stones were woven. The walls were adorned, too, and one may imagine either decorative assemblages of polychromatic marble, as in the Trier Aula, or, again, mosaics, though there is no hint of any specific iconographic program.¹³² Curtains—some embroidered, some unembroidered, some purple, some not—hung between door arches and columned arcades; sumptuous benches draped with fabrics ran along the walls.¹³³ For an approximation of the intended effects of such architectural decorations, the modern observer could do worse than look to the golden mosaics of the Rotunda at Thessaloniki: here one finds all the individual elements attested in the literary depictions of the Great Palace visualized and can experience the dazzling ensemble. The Rotunda mosaics, to be sure, are not meant to depict a

131 See, below, note 202.

132 For the wall decoration of the Trier aula, see V. Ruppiené, “Pavements and Revetments in the Audience Hall (Basilika) and Its Vestibule of the Late-Antique Imperial Palace in Trier (Germany),” in Ruppiené, *Stone and Splendor*, 37–54. A monograph detailing Ruppiené’s striking reconstruction of the marble reverments is in preparation. As for mosaics, the only surviving archaeological evidence within the palace are those of bucolic scenes wholly unfitting for the context of the Consistory. Cf. S. Bassett, “The Great Palace Mosaic and the Image of Imperial Power,” in *Mosaics of Anatolia*, ed. G. Sözen (Istanbul, 2011), 89–100.

133 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.205–7.

specific building or even an imperial one, but they are extrusions of the same image paradigm that also influenced the iconography of the Great Palace, namely, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Its golden columns and mosaics, the arches and walls set with emeralds and sapphires, the purple-colored curtains spanning between fixtures recall not only the Heavenly Court, but the earthly one as well. Such shimmering and glittering surroundings are a trope of sixth century and later literature, particularly of ekphrasis, but we should take them seriously: they were also a reflection of actual practice. The imperial audience, as Carile has put it, happened in just such an “amazement of bright light.”¹³⁴

There is, however, one specific and highly symbolic object within the Consistory about which there is reliable information: Justin’s throne, the *sedes Augusta*, was positioned in the center of the room, surrounded by four columns that supported an orthogonal canopy that, as Corippus explicitly states, was supposed to represent the vault of heaven:

The imperial throne ennobles the middle of the sanctum, girded with four marvelous columns, over which rests a canopy shining with abundant liquid gold, like the vault of the curving sky, and shades over the immortal head and throne of the emperor as he sits there, the throne adorned with jewels and proud with purple and gold. It had curved four bending arches into itself. A similar Victory held the right side and the left side, hanging high into the air on extended wings, stretching out in her shining right hand a crown of laurel.¹³⁵

134 Carile, *The Vision*, 174. For the Rotunda as Heavenly Jerusalem, see Carile, *The Vision*, 49–100, and for its decorations and architecture, see H. Torp, *La Rotonde Palatine à Thessalonique: Architecture et mosaïques*, 2 vols. (Athens, 2018).

135 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.194–203: *Nobilitat medios sedes augusta penates, / quattuor eximis circumvallata columnis, / quas super ex solido praefulgens cymbius auro / immodico, simulans convexi clima caeli, / inmortale caput soliumque sedentis obumbrat, / ornatum gemmis, auroque ostroque superbum. / Quattuor in sese nexos curvaverat arcus. / Par laevam dextramque tenens Victoria partem / altius erectis pendebat in aera pennis, / laurigeram gestans dextra fulgente coronam* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*, modified). Here, again, the text is uncertain, and Cameron follows two conjectures: one by M. Petschenig, ed., *Flavii Cresconii Corippi Africani Grammatici quae supersunt* (Berlin, 1886), who prints *in medio* instead of *immodico* (line 197), as the Matritensis codex has it. I agree with Petschenig’s

The canopy itself has an obvious cosmic connotation, representing the heavens bending over the ecumene.¹³⁶ This detailed description—the only one of the late Roman imperial throne—can be supplemented with some well-known examples of imperial and ecclesiastical art. For instance, a (roughly) contemporary depiction of the imperial throne on a famous ivory diptych now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien shows either the empress Ariadne or, perhaps, Justin's wife, Sophia, seated on an imperial, canopied throne (Fig. 2).¹³⁷ The iconography matches Corippus's description: the empress is clad in an imperial chlamys, whose borders are set with pearls and jewels and that includes a *segmentum/tablion* with the portrait of the emperor, as does a sister piece of the diptych (Fig. 3), held by the

emendation, but take *in medio* not to mean the literal center of the hall, but rather the middle of the apse, in which the throne was likely placed. The second conjecture goes back to D. R. Shackleton Bailey, "Notes on Corippus," *CPh* 50 (1955): 119–24, esp. 120, who emends *solido . . . auro* for the manuscript reading of *liquido . . . auro* (*Matritensis: lido*, corrected in a second hand to *liquido*; cf. Cameron, *In laudem*, 20). Shackleton Bailey nevertheless selects "shining with liquid gold." To Shackleton Bailey ("Notes," 120), "*liquidus* is an unusual if not unexampled epithet for solid gold," but Corippus does not mean solid gold—referring not to its materiality, but to the glittering, shining quality. Ramírez de Verger, *Flavio Cresconio Coripo*, 159, complicates the matter unnecessarily when he follows the original *Matritensis* writing of *lido* but emends to *Lydo auro . . . inmodico* ("abundante oro de Lidia"). On the imperial throne, see L'Orange, *Studies*, 134–35, and Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, 56–57.

136 On the symbolism and history of throne canopies, see A. Alföldi, "Die Geschichte des Throntabernakels," *La nouvelle Clio* 1–2 (1949–50): 537–66, esp. at 537: "In Wahrheit ist er ein wesentliches Kennzeichen der Bestrebung aller monarchischen Regime der Welt, den Machthaber von der übrigen Menschheit zu isolieren und ihn weit über die träge Masse der Beherrschten zu erheben"; Alföldi, *Monarchische Repräsentation*, 242–52; H. Michaelis, "Der Thronbaldachin (Zum Verständnis eines Herrschersymbols)," in *Aus der byzantinistischen Arbeit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik II*, ed. J. Irmischer (Berlin, 1957), 110–19. For a systematic analysis of the role and form of canopies in late antique and Byzantine churches, see P. Bogdanović, *The Framing of Sacred Space: The Canopy of the Byzantine Church* (Oxford, 2017), esp. 10–45, for the literary evidence (e.g., the description of the canopy in Hagia Sophia by Paul the Silentary, *Description of St. Sophia*, 2147–48).

137 On the Vienna ivory (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Antikensammlung, X 39), dating to the sixth century, see D. Angelova, "The Ivories of Ariadne and Ideas about Female Imperial Authority in Rome and Early Byzantium," *Gesta* 43 (2004): 1–15. For a possible identification of the empress as Sophia, rather than Ariadne, cf. A. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses* (New York, 2002), 149–78.

Bargello Museum, Florence.¹³⁸ An imperial diadem/crown rests on her elaborately coiffed head, with pearl pendilia falling from it on each side. She sits on a high-backed throne decorated with jewels and pearls (*ornatum gemmis*, as Corippus described it), her feet resting on an equally ornate suppedaneum. The back of the throne rises to more than shoulder height behind her and is also decorated with precious stones. Her back is supported by a tubular pillow made from heavily decorated cloth, very likely of purple and with gold thread. Two pillars (out of four, according to Corippus) are visible, each decorated with three jeweled bands; curtains hang from a transverse curtain rod and are pulled aside, the textile wrapping around the columns.

The only difference between this visual representation in ivory and Corippus's ekphrasis are the two Victoriae holding laurel wreaths; on the ivory, they are replaced by two eagles with spread wings perching on the front columns.¹³⁹ The ivory gives no indication as to the decoration or material of the canopy, but there is a striking iconographic parallel in an illumination in the Codex Purpureus Rossanensis, a sixth- or seventh-century manuscript incorporating the gospels of Matthew and Mark. The folio in question contains two miniatures (Fig. 4): at the top, the trial of Christ before Pontius Pilate, with the Roman procurator adorned with late antique symbols of imperial authority, inter alia the throne with tubular pillow, flanked by standards with imperial portraits; and at the bottom, a scene depicting Judas's remorse and his attempt to give his 30 pieces of silver back to the Sanhedrin. The latter scene depicts the chief priest sitting in a Roman official's seat, surrounded by four columns supporting a heavily decorated segmented canopy with a golden interior and insets of colored glass or precious stones.¹⁴⁰

138 The imperial portrait is difficult to make out on the Vienna ivory, but clearly visible on its sister piece in Italy (Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Collezione Riccardi, inv. no. 24 C; see also below, n. 139).

139 The Bargello diptych reproduces all of the elements of the Vienna piece, but with additional details that are not pertinent here. In both pieces, the empress holds a scepter in her hand in addition to the *globus cruciger*. The perching eagles of the Vienna ivory hold a laurel wreath in their beaks that spans the canopy.

140 Rossano, Museo Diocesano e del Codex, Codex Purpureus Rossanensis Σ (o42), fol. 8r; see W. Loerke, "The Miniatures of the Trial in the Rossano Gospels," *ArtB* 43 (1961): 171–95.



Fig. 2. Diptych of Ariadne (or Sophia?). Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien / Antikensammlung X 39, ca. 500 CE. Photo © KHM-Museumsverband, Vienna.



Fig. 3. Diptych of Ariadne (or Sophia?). Museo Nazionale del Bargello / Collezioni Riccardi, Florence, inv. 24C, ca. 500 CE. Photo by Praxinoa; courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 4. (top) Illumination of Pilate's judgment of Christ; (bottom) Judas's repentance. Codex Purpureus Rossanensis Σ 043, fol. 8r, sixth century. Photo © Museo Diocesano e del Codex Rossano, Rossano / Arcidiocese di Rossano-Cariati, Italy.



Fig. 5. Gold solidus of Valens, *RIC IX* Antioch 23B: obv.: D N VALENS – PER F AVG, with an imperial bust and pearl diadem as well as a trabea and holding a mappa and scepter; rev.: VOTA – PV-BLICA, with two emperors, Valens and Valentinian, diademed and nimbed, seated on a high-backed throne and holding a mappa and scepter, with kneeling captives at their feet. American Numismatic Society 1944.100.25294. Photo courtesy of the American Numismatic Society.

Other iconographic evidence provides additional details about the appearance of the throne. On a multitude of late antique coins from all the imperial mints, the bejeweled *sedes Augusta* often appears as a double-width throne, seating two augusti.¹⁴¹ One such example is a solidus minted by Valens circa 367–375 (Fig. 5), showing the diademed bust of Valens on the obverse.¹⁴² The reverse depicts both Valens and his brother Valentinian I, both nimbed, wearing a trabea and holding a scepter and mappa while seated on a throne set with pearls or jewels, their feet resting on ornate suppedanea. Apart from the general nature of the thrones as high-backed seats, however, there is little one can tell from these depictions; the hints of pearl encrustations and textile decorations may merely be iconographic conventions. Further evidence of gold-plated and bejeweled thrones and footrests for Roman

emperors are rare in secular iconography, but a strikingly early example is located in the so-called imperial cult chamber at Luxor, where a tetrarchic fresco depicts an imperial audience. The fresco is badly damaged, unfortunately, but one section clearly shows a purple-shod imperial foot resting on a golden and bejeweled suppedaneum (Fig. 6).¹⁴³

The clearest visual parallels of how imperial thrones might have looked, however, come from ecclesiastical art. The motif of the empty or prepared throne, *hetoimasia* (after the Greek for “preparation”), as a symbol of the Trinity and, later, the impeding Second Coming of Christ, has led to a variety of different thrones obviously inspired by imperial models. Among the most well-known examples, the one in the Arian baptistery, in Ravenna, has a jeweled cross standing atop an empty throne with a suppedaneum, purple-and-gold

¹⁴¹ E.g., for Valentinian and Valens, *RIC IX* Antioch no. 23a (two emperors on one throne); for Gratian, *RIC IX* Antioch no. 20g (two single thrones for two emperors); for Valentinian II, *RIC IX* Mediolanum no. 5d (double throne); for Theodosius I, *RIC IX* (Valentinian I–Theodosius I) no. 40b. Under Justin, a copper half-follis (*MIBEC* 95, no. 44c, now at Dumbarton Oaks, BZC.1967.17.9) was struck, showing the emperor and his wife Sophia sitting side by side on two lyre-backed thrones. The shared-thrones motif survived until at least into the seventh century, as a silver hexagram struck under Heraclius shows (*MIB* 3:222, no. 135, now at Dumbarton Oaks, BZC.2015.015).

¹⁴² *RIC IX* Antioch, no. 23b.

¹⁴³ On the frescoes and their preservation, see J. Deckers, “Die Wandmalerei im Kaiserkulturaum von Luxor,” *JDAI* 96 (1979): 600–52; M. Jones and S. McFadden, ed., *Art of Empire: The Roman Frescoes and Imperial Cult Chamber in Luxor Temple* (New Haven, CT, 2015); N. Barbagli, “The Emperors in the Province: A Study of the Tetrarchic Images from the Imperial Cult Chamber in Luxor,” in *A Globalised Visual Culture? Towards a Geography of Late Antique Art*, ed. F. Guidetti and K. Meinecke (Oxford, 2020), 91–131. On this fresco and the debate about Diocletian as innovator in ceremonial, see also Rollinger, “These Boots.” The suppedaneum in the famous drawing of Constantius II as consul in the *Chronograph of 354* is undecorated.



Fig. 6. At upper right, suppedaneum with imperial foot, tetrarchic fresco in the imperial cult chamber at Luxor, ca. 300 CE. Photo by Yarko Kobylecki, 2008; courtesy of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE).

tubular pillow, and jeweled, high-rising backrest; no less than 711 pearls and 123 precious stones of various hues cover the throne itself (Fig. 7).¹⁴⁴ In Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, the fifth-century mosaics on the apex of the arch include a *hetoimasia* commissioned by Pope Sixtus III (432–440), of similar shape and splendor.¹⁴⁵ Finally, a miniature in a ninth-century edition of homilies by Gregory Nazianzus shows the empty throne (and *suppedaneum*) set up by Theodosius I (r. 379–395) during the sessions of the First Council of Constantinople in 381: all-golden, beset with pearls and jewels, and covered in purple textiles (Fig. 8).¹⁴⁶

Why is the appearance of throne and canopy so important? Because of the cumulative effect of gleaming gold and gold-threaded purple, shimmering pearls, and glittering jewels. In poetic language, it is “the chariot of Phoebus and the purple of the Emperor” that “shines with youthful light” and by which the ceiling is “set on fire” (*flammatus*); the emperor himself is “purple gleaming” (*πορφυραγές*) and a “purple glittering sun” (*ἡλιε πορφυράκτινε*).¹⁴⁷ In reality, the combination of the soft light from large numbers of candles and oil lamps as well as the clear and bright sunlight streaming through the windows, illuminating the purple chlamys and reflected in the rippling and iridescent surfaces of tens of thousands of golden-glass tesserae, must have produced a striking, ethereal image. The impression would have been comparable to the effect of the light in Hagia Sophia as recorded by Paul the Silentary in *Description of Hagia Sophia*: “The roof is compacted of gilded tesserae from which a stream of golden rays pours abundantly and strikes men’s eyes with irresistible

force. It is as if one were gazing at the midday sun in spring when it gilds each mountain top.”¹⁴⁸

Bathed in a billowing gold luminescence, the audience hall at the Great Palace would have awakened associations of the imperial “sun” and the court of the Heavenly Father. At the center of it all, surrounded by reflecting and glittering surfaces, at first hidden behind curtains, then revealed to all, was the emperor, enthroned in light and majesty, surrounded by a host of courtiers also dressed in splendor, red-robed dignitaries, and bodyguards in startling white, “so that it seemed as though stars were shining on the earth.”¹⁴⁹ Compare this, again, with scriptural references to God enthroned, sitting in judgment, surrounded by angels, thrones, and powers dressed in white and gold and shining with his reflected light.¹⁵⁰

The book of Revelation has a striking description of John beholding the vision of God: “Immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow around the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.”¹⁵¹ Corippus’s description of Justin during the Avar audience is reminiscent of its biblical image paradigm: the emperor, on his brilliant throne and under a resplendent (*praefulgens*) canopy, appeared also “like a jasper and a sardine stone”; he was clad in the purple and jeweled imperial chlamys, not too far off from the dark-to-dullish red hues of sardius (or carnelian), jacinth, or jasper stones, which are found in a variety of different colors.¹⁵² A figurative “rainbow” had formed around

¹⁴⁴ I counted them.

¹⁴⁵ For further examples of the *hetoimasia*, see A. Bergmeier, “Volatile Images: The Empty Throne and Its Place in the Byzantine Last Judgment Iconography,” in *Cultures of Eschatology*, ed. V. Wieder, V. Eltschinger, and J. Heiss, vol. 1 (Berlin, 2020), 84–122, with appendix.

¹⁴⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 510, fol. 355r. The emperor, diademed and clad in a purple chlamys with golden *tablion*, is seated to the right of the throne, slightly elevated among the bishops.

¹⁴⁷ Merobaudes, *Carmina* 2.2–3 (ed. Clover), and Theodoros Prodromos, *Poemata* 12.4 and 7 (ed. Hörandner). The radiant and shining imperial purple had become a well-worn trope by the fourth century. Cf., e.g., Amm. Marc. 15.8.15: *imperatoris muricis fulgore flagrantem*, and 20.4.22: *fulgentem eum augusto habitu conspissentem*.

¹⁴⁸ Paul the Silentary, *Description of St. Sophia* 668–72 (C. de Stefani, ed., *Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae: Descriptio Ambonis* [Berlin, 2011]): Χρυσεοκολλήτους δὲ τέγος ψηφίδας ἐέργει, / ὃν ἀπὸ μαρμαρουσα χύδην χρυσόρρυτος δάκτις / ἀνδρομέοις ἄτλητος ἐπεσκίρησε προσώποις. / φαίνεται Φαέθοντα μεσημβρινὸν εἴαρος ὥρην / εἰσοράν, στε πᾶσαν ἐπεχρύσωσεν ἐρίπνην (trans. James, “Senses,” 527–28).

¹⁴⁹ Mark the Deacon, *Life of Porphyry* 47 (H. Grégoire and M.-A. Krugener, ed., *Marc le Diacre: Vie de Porphyre, évêque de Gaza* [Paris, 1930]; G. F. Hill, trans., *The Life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza* [Oxford, 1913]).

¹⁵⁰ Dan. 7:9–10; Is. 6:1–3; Rev. 4:1–11, 7:9–11.

¹⁵¹ Rev. 4:2–3: Εὐθέως ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι, καὶ ἴδον θρόνος ἔκειτο ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος, καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ὅμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἵσπιδῳ καὶ σαρδίῳ, καὶ ἱρις κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου ὅμοιος ὁράσει σμαραγδίνῳ (trans. KJV).

¹⁵² It should be noted, however, that the precise color value associated with the ancient terminology is not completely clear, and it may be that the ancient and modern names do not match.



Fig. 7. Detail, *hetoimasia* mosaic in the cupola of the Arian baptistery, Ravenna, fifth century. Photo by Georges Jansoone; courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 8. A *hetoimasia* during the First Council of Constantinople (381); illumination from a collection of the *Homilies of Gregory Nazianzus*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, gr. 510, fol. 355r, ninth century. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the emperor composed of light reflected in different hues by gold and purple, rubies, emeralds and sapphires, by glass tesserae, armor, weapons, shining golden and purple cloth.¹⁵³ Tellingly, the use of such divinely connotated precious stones—emeralds and sapphire count among the twelve foundational stones of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Apocalypse of John, and its gates were fashioned of pearls—was regulated by law, as with purple-dyed textiles. An edict issued by Emperor Leo I decreed, “No one at all shall be allowed to fasten or insert pearls, emeralds, and sapphires on their bridles, saddles, and belts. . . . They should use these kinds of clasps on robes that are precious only because of gold and the skill (in making them). . . . No private individual shall be allowed to make anything from gold and gems that belongs to imperial dress and decoration.”¹⁵⁴ These gemstones were associated with imperial dignity and office, as were specific hues of purple, whose manufacture and possession the law also regulated.¹⁵⁵ The gems enumerated in Leo’s law were reserved for “royal use” (*usibus regiis*), especially for objects associated with emperorship (*ornamenta regia*), and in particular the emperor’s jewel-studded pearl fibula and diadem. The imperial diadem as famously illustrated in the mosaic of Justinian in San Vitale in Ravenna (see Fig. 1) included

¹⁵³ Compare this with the description of rainbow colors in Amm. Marc. 20.11.27–28, which matches the colors of the imperial costume: *cuius species, quantum mortalis oculus contuetur prima lutea visitor, secunda flavescens vel fulua, punicea tertia, quarta purpurea, postrema caeruleo concreta et viridi.*

¹⁵⁴ Cod. Iust. 11.12.1: pr. *Nulli prorsus liceat in frenis et equestribus sellis vel in balteis suis margaritas et smaragdos et hyacinthos aptare posthac vel inserere. . . . Fibulis quoque in chlamydibus his utantur, quae solo auro et arte pretiosae sunt. . . . i. Nulli praeterea privatorum liceat . . . aliquid ex auro et gemmis quod ad cultum et ornatum imperatorum pertinet facere* (B. W. Frier et al., trans., *The Codex of Justinian: A New Annotated Translation, with Parallel Latin and Greek Text* [Cambridge, 2016]). Bejeweled imperial bridles are also attested by a striking passage in Claudian’s panegyric on the occasion of Honorius’s fourth consulate (Claudian, IV *Cons. Hon.* 549–50), describing the imperial horse: *turpantur phalerae, spumosis morsibus aurum / fumat, anhelantes exundant sanguine gemmae* (His harness rattles and the golden bit steams from the foaming bite, the breathed-on jewels flow with blood). The famous Barberini Diptych of Justinian in the Louvre gives a good impression of what an imperial bridle and *phalerae* may have looked like, as does the so-called Kersch *missorium*, now in the Hermitage Museum, likely depicting Constantius II on horseback.

¹⁵⁵ M. Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity* (Brussels, 1970), 62–70; cf. Hunger, *Neuen Mitte*, 84–96 for imperial monopolies in general.

rubies (or jacinths or amethysts?) and emeralds, a double row of pearls set in a golden circlet, and two pearl pendilia framing his face. They collectively added to the “godly” effect of the emperor sparkling like a rainbow.

The Apocalypse mentions a further element of light symbolism: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal.”¹⁵⁶ Depending on how much of the floors and walls of the audience hall was decorated, one can imagine the effect of a “sea of glass” produced architecturally by means of different kinds of marble slabs and revetments. Similar choreographies of material and lights, as well as their effect on viewers, have been observed and analyzed in various buildings.¹⁵⁷ In Hagia Sophia, the use of Proconnesian and other marbles, combined with the sunlight reflecting off a multitude of different surfaces, produces a rippling and shape-shifting appearance reminiscent of the one pervasive in Corippus’s description of the palace. In *Description of Hagia Sophia*, Paul the Silentary likens the interplay of material and lighting to molten metal, describes the shining marble of the ambo *inter alia* as “silver-shining” and “golden,” and associates the marble surfaces with the waters of the Bosphorus.¹⁵⁸ One may imagine a similar choreography of marble and light in the Consistory. The sum total of these elements created an effect that would not have been far from the panegyrical and quasi-religious description in the sources of a divinely sanctioned monarch who shone of his own accord.

¹⁵⁶ Rev. 4:6: καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλίνη ὄμοια κρυστάλλῳ (trans. KJV).

¹⁵⁷ F. Barry, “Walking on Water: Cosmic Floors in Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” *ArtB* 89 (2007): 627–56; F. Barry, “The House of the Rising Sun: Luminosity and Sacrality from Domus to Ecclesia,” in Lidov, *Hierotopy of Light and Fire*, 82–104; Pentcheva, “Multisensory Aesthetics”; B. Pentcheva, “The Power of Glittering Materiality: Mirror Reflections between Poetry and Architecture in Greek and Arabic Medieval Culture,” in *Istanbul and Water*, ed. P. Magdalino and N. Ergin (Leuven, 2015), 241–74; Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia*. I would also again point out the characterization of the golden canopy of the throne as “shining with liquid gold” in Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.196; see above, note 135.

¹⁵⁸ Paul the Silentary, *Description of St. Sophia* 91–92 (ed. de Stefani): ὃς δὲ μεταίστσει μὲν ἐξ ἀργυροφονίας, εἰσέτι δ’ οὐπω / τρέψειν ὅλην χροήν ἔτι λείψανα χρύσει φαινών; 664–67: πᾶν δὲ πέδον στορέσασι Προκοννήσοιο κολώνη / ἀσπασίως ὑπέθηκε βιαρκεῖ νῶτον ἀνάστην· / ἥρεμα δὲ φρίσσουσα διέπρεπε Βοσπορίς αἰγῆν / ἀκροκελαινιώντος ἐπ’ ἀργεννοῖο μετάλλουν. Pentcheva, “Multisensory Aesthetics,” 96, acknowledges the intertextuality of such descriptions but rightly surmises that it “also integrates a direct response to the sensual materiality of the space and uncovers in it a metaphysical dimension.”

Powers and Thrones

Just as the heavenly ruler was surrounded by attendants—in John’s vision by twenty-four white-clad elders and six-winged, myriad-eyed seraphim—so too was the emperor of the Romans.¹⁵⁹ The sources provide a relatively full accounting of which courtiers and officials took part in audiences. Some receive explicit mention, with their duties detailed in the chapters from the *Book of Ceremonies* attributed to Peter the Patrician: the magister officiorum and his assistants; the officials of the *scrinia*, the different administrative bureaus; the *tertiocerius*, the third most senior court notary; the comes admissionum and a number of his staff, tasked with executing the audiences; the chamberlain (*praepositus sacri cubiculi*); the *silentiaries*, whose role was to ensure ritual silence; the *candidati* and their decurion and other bodyguards; the bearers of the imperial labara; the noble pages; and the gatekeepers and porters (*ostiarii*).¹⁶⁰ The *proceres/ἀρχοντες*, a collective term denoting the highest officials of the palace, are also mentioned, and although it is nowhere explained who exactly belonged to this group, it is almost certainly included the *comites consistoriani*—i.e., the magister, the *quaestor sacri palatii*, the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, and the *comes rerum privatistarum*—the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, as well as the *magistri militum* in presence and perhaps some of the higher-ranking *decuriones* and *comites* of the various scholae. Others in attendance belonged to the wider court.

According to the *Book of Ceremonies*, diplomatic receptions explicitly took the form of an assembly called the *silention*, the later name for the emperor’s *consistorium*, that is, his official council.¹⁶¹ The role of the emperor’s council had changed in late antiquity. While it had originally functioned as a decision-making body and a court of justice, by the sixth century, it was no longer a setting for discussion or exchange of opinion, but

instead had become a ceremonial framework in which the emperor’s decisions were ritually proclaimed and received with acclamations by the grandees present.¹⁶² This was also the case with diplomatic audiences; contrary to the accounts of Corippus and Menander the Guardsman, which include differently stylized verbal confrontations between the serene but war-like Justin and the impudent “barbarians,” “only the *honneurs* were made and gifts exchanged,” at least during the initial audience.¹⁶³ A novel of Justinian describes the composition of the full silention: in addition to the court officials enumerated above, the highest civil officials (that is, the praetorian and urban prefects, who did not belong to the inner court), the *magistri militum*, and, importantly, the Constantinopolitan senate itself (i.e., assorted patricians, consuls, consulars, honorary consuls, and other *illustri*).¹⁶⁴ The patriarch was only occasionally invited and thus in attendance.¹⁶⁵ There are strong indications that palace officials and servants from the ranks of the *cubicularii*, the private attendants of the emperor and palace, were also present: the chamberlain, whose office was close to the emperor, attended as a matter of course, but Corippus also mentions “a throng of eunuchs” who served the emperor, likely referring to the *cubicularii*.¹⁶⁶ In total, then, participants in this ceremony may have easily numbered in the dozens or even hundreds, especially if one includes the armed bodyguards.

Among all those, however, Corippus highlighted one person: Narses, the imperial sword-bearer (*spatharius*), who was either a eunuch bodyguard or commander of a eunuch bodyguard.¹⁶⁷ In Corippus’s

162 D. Graves, “*Consistorium domini*: Imperial Councils of State in the Later Roman Empire” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1973).

163 Christophilopulu, “ΣΙΛΕΝΤΙΟΝ,” 84.

164 CIC Nov 62.2. Cf. Christophilopulu, “ΣΙΛΕΝΤΙΟΝ.” Cf. Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.213: *egreditur princeps magno comitante senatu*.

165 Christophilopulu, “ΣΙΛΕΝΤΙΟΝ,” 81 n. 1–2.

166 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.214.

167 PLRE 3b 930–31 (Narses 4). This is not Justinian’s famous military commander, who was also spatharius at some point in his career. Corippus refers to Narses as *armiger* throughout his text, but there is much uncertainty surrounding both titles. E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1949), 1:297, identified the *spatharius* as commander of the *spatharo-cubicularii*; for the eunuch bodyguards of late antiquity, see M. E. Stewart, “Protectors and Assassins: Armed Eunuch-Cubicularii and -Spatharii, 400–532,” in *Brill’s Companion to*

159 Rev. 4:1–11.

160 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.87–89 (ed. Reiske, 393–408).

161 The term *silention* derives from the ceremonial silence that had to be observed in the presence of the emperor. Cf. Treitinger, *Reichsidee*, 52–55; A. Christophilopulu, “ΣΙΛΕΝΤΙΟΝ,” *BZ* 44 (1951): 79–85; A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1964), 333–41; R. Smith, “The Imperial Court of the Late Roman Empire, c. AD 300–c. AD 450,” in *The Court and Court Society in Ancient Monarchies*, ed. A. Spawforth (Cambridge, 2007), 157–232, esp. 198–202, also 215–20.

description, he surpassed all others' physical appearance, with the exception of the emperor, of course:

In the meantime came Narses, the emperor's sword-bearer, following on in the steps of his master, towering a head over all the lines, and made the imperial hall shine with his beauty, his hair well arranged, handsome in form and face. He was in gold all over [*aureus omnis erat*], yet modest in dress and appearance, and pleasing for his upright ways, venerable for his virtue, brilliant [*fulmineus*], careful, watchful night and day for the rulers of the world, shining with glorious light [*honora luce coruscus*]: as the morning star, glittering in the clear sky outdoes the silvery constellations with its golden rays and announces the coming of day with its clear flame.¹⁶⁸

Narses make a second appearance in the fourth book, there accompanying the emperor during his consular procession:

There too stood the sword-bearer Narses, firm in his bodily strength and kindly in mien and white-haired gravity, and adorned the imperial throne as he held his glorious standards. Like precious agate or the Parian stone shining out in the midst of yellow gold as the hand of the artist shapes it: he was as bright with light, as calm in mind, as handsome with his gentle expressions, as he protected the back of the emperor

Bodyguards in the Ancient Mediterranean, ed. M. Hebblewhite and C. Whately (Leiden, 2022), 272–91, and cf. J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century, with a Revised Text of the Kletorologion of Philotheos* (Oxford, 1911), 112–13: “The earliest Imperial spatharioi were perhaps cubicularii who had a military character and bore a sword.” By the eighth century, the office had become a title.

168 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.220–30: *Armiger interea, domini vestigia lustrans, / eminent excelsus super omnia vertice Narses / agmina, et augustam cultu praefulgurat aulam, / comptus caesarie formaque insignis et ore. / Aureus omnis erat, cultuque habituque modestus / et morum probitate placens, virtute verendus, / fulmineus, cautus, vigilans noctesque diesque / pro rerum dominis, et honora luce coruscus, / matutina micans ut caelo stella sereno / auratis radiis argentea sidera vincit / vicinumque diem claro praenuntiat igne* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

and shone in his bright armour [*claris fulgebat in armis*].¹⁶⁹

The physical beauty of eunuchs is a well-established trope in late antique and Byzantine literature,¹⁷⁰ but, strikingly, Corippus expresses this physical beauty in terms of a golden light emanating from the eunuch's figure as it does from the emperor. This is, again, a symbolic connection between the earthly and heavenly courts as, in the later Byzantine imaginaire, eunuchs were closely associated with angels. Corippus's depiction, together with the so-called *Vision of Dorotheus*, discussed below, is one of the earliest indications of this notion with respect to the imperial court.¹⁷¹

Angels were the messengers of God, whereas eunuch cubicularii could be, and frequently were, employed as palace messengers. As Cyril Mango explained, “The angels, being sexless and acting as God's attendants, had their closest earthly analogy in the eunuchs of the imperial palace.”¹⁷² This parallel makes perfect sense and was emphasized in late antique and Byzantine texts, among them the *Life of John of Cyprus* (the Almsgiver) by Leontios of Neapolis.¹⁷³ More subtly, eunuchs themselves, by virtue of their physical appearance, also served to announce the impending imperial presence, like the morning star “announcing the coming of the day,” to use Corippus's turn of phrase. This close identification is, again, easy to explain. Court eunuchs were employed in a variety of tasks in the

169 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 4.366–73: *Nec non ensipotens, membrorum robore constans, / adspectu mentis non a gravitate, benignus, / astabat Narses sedemque ornabat herilem / splendida signa gerens, qualis pretiosus achates / aut medius fulvo Parius lapis enitet auro / artificis formante manu: sic luce coruscus, / sic animo placidus, miti sic gratior ore, / terga tegens domini claris fulgebat in armis* (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

170 G. Sidéris, “Eunuchs of Light”: Power, Imperial Ceremonial and Positive Representations of Eunuchs in Byzantium (4th–12th Centuries AD),” in *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. S. Tougher (London, 2002), 161–75; Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 78, 90, 148; cf. S. Tougher, “Bearding Byzantium: Masculinity, Eunuchs and the Byzantine Life Course,” in *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, ed. B. Neil and L. Garland (Farnham, 2013), 153–66.

171 Ringrose, *Perfect Servant*, 163–83. For a very brief overview of Byzantine angelology, see Mango, *Byzantium*, 154.

172 Mango, *Byzantium*, 155.

173 Leontios, *Life of John of Cyprus* 52.39–46, 53.34–39, 60.1–10 (A. J. Festugière and L. Rydén, ed., *Léontios de Néapolis: Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre* [Paris, 1974]). Cf. Sidéris, “Eunuchs of Light.”

palace, all of which led to and necessitated their being in close physical proximity to the ruler. Where there were eunuchs, there was an emperor (or a member of the imperial family). As Maria Parani has argued, however, there was also a metaphysical or quasi-religious component to this proximity, a statement on the imperial *basileia* itself, “a power so awe-inspiring and fearsome that it could not be directly approached by ordinary human beings, but needed to be mediated by the eunuchs, angel-like and pure.”¹⁷⁴

In late antique, and particularly in Byzantine Constantinople, this parallelization between the earthly and heavenly court was incorporated into court ceremonial and religious art.¹⁷⁵ At court, eunuchs dressed in splendid court costume were distinguished by insignia conveying their rank of dignity. Costumes and insignia—the scabbard and torques of the *spatharri*, for instance—were of gilt or of silver inlay, studded with jewels and pearls. Visual depictions of angels and archangels in religious contexts, on the other hand, made use of court costumes, including imperial ones, for their representation, just as angels appearing in literary visions always dressed in court costume, the details of which allowed some recipients of such visions to identify the angel-eunuch’s celestial “rank.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, the beautiful and incandescent Narses, bearing the imperial arms, dressed in pure white and gold, “adorning” the imperial throne, evokes the image of an angel or archangel attending the throne of God, both as a literary topos and during ceremonies themselves, where Narses would have stood close by the emperor.

That Narses radiates light himself, not merely reflecting the imperial light as the emperor’s sister does in Merobaudes’ *Carmen*,¹⁷⁷ is an important detail. It distinguishes him from other courtiers and officials present, even from members of the imperial family, and especially from the various other bodyguards. As shown above, monarchy in late antiquity and in the Byzantine

174 Parani, “Look Like an Angel,” 437.

175 Parani, “Look Like an Angel,” passim.

176 Parani, “Look Like an Angel,” 436, with sources in note 16. Cf. G. Peers, *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley, 2001), 1–11; M. Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium: Perceptions and Representations in Art and Text* (Basingstoke, 2009), 86–115. See C. Jolivet-Lévy, “Notes sur la représentation des arches anges en costume impérial dans l’iconographie byzantine,” *Cah Arch* 46 (1998): 121–28, for depictions of angels in religious art.

177 See above, note 114.

period became closely associated with light and brilliance as well as with physical beauty. The very same physical qualities were ascribed, somewhat naturally, to the ruler’s closest companions. Among them were the court eunuchs and the imperial bodyguards, who had regular and mostly unimpeded access to him. The physiognomy of guard soldiers was such that it attracted attention. Procopius informs the reader that Justin I, upon his first arrival in Constantinople and enlisting as a soldier, was enrolled among the *excubitores* guard because of his attractive physique.¹⁷⁸ Their demeanor and appearance was seen as a reflection of the *basileia*, all the more so given the potential overlap between eunuchs and (typically non-eunuch) bodyguards—as in the case of spatharii like Narses, who might have numbered among the select bodyguard, the forty candidati.¹⁷⁹ It comes as no surprise that Synesius of Cyrene describes the bodyguards in his *Oration on Royalty* as “a sort of picked force detached from the army itself, of men all young, tall, fair-haired and superb, ‘their heads ever anointed and their faces fair’ [Hom. *Od.* 15.332], equipped with golden shields and golden lances. At the sight of these we are made aware beforehand of the king’s approach, much as, I imagine, we recognize the sun by the rays that rise above the horizon.”¹⁸⁰

Where Corippus’s Narses is the morning star, Synesius’s bodyguards are a protuberance of the imperial sun, a source of light, and they the product of it. This, again, is not merely a literary trope. Guards, as Synesius alludes to, were luxuriously equipped, with belts, shields, spears, and even horse bridles made of gold or gilt and silver-inlaid materials.¹⁸¹ Though the

178 Procopius, *Secret History* 6.2–3.

179 Stewart, “Protectors and Assassins,” 289: “By the close of the sixth century, one could be both a *candidatus* and a *spatharius* simultaneously, and these individuals could either be eunuchs or non-eunuchs.”

180 Synesius, *On Royalty* 16.6 (ed. Lamoureux): ἀπὸ τῆς στρατιᾶς στρατιά τις ἔκκριτος, νέοι πάντες, πάντες εὐμήκεις, τὰς κόμας ἔκνθοι τε καὶ περιττοί, αἱὲ δὲ λιπαροὶ κεφαλὴς καὶ καλὰ πρόσωπα, χρυσάσπιδες καὶ χρυσεολόγχαι, οἵς, δταν ποτὲ ὄφθωσι, τὸν βασιλέα σημαινόμεθα, καθάπερ, οἵμαι, ταῖς προκαντούσσαις ἀκτίς τὸν ἥλιον (A. Fitzgerald, trans., *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene, Including the Address to the Emperor Arcadius and the Political Speeches* [London, 1930]). Cf. Them. *Or.* I 1–2.

181 R. Delmaire, “Les soldats de la garde impériale à l’époque théodosienne: Le témoignage des sources religieuses,” *AntTard* 16 (2008): 37–42. Cf. Amm. Marc. 16.10.7; 31.10.9; Synesius, *On Royalty* 16.6 (ed. Lamoureux); John Chrysostom, *Quod reg. 6* (PG 47:527); *In ep. ad Eph.* 9.1 (PG 42:70); *In ep. ad Phil.* 13.4 (PG 42:281); and *In ep. ad*

guards were usually uniformly dressed, the tunics and costumes of the main guard units—the scholae palatinae and the excubitores—could also be polychromatic, as in the case of Justinian's guard on the famous Ravenna mosaic.¹⁸² The candidati, as their name indicated, wore white (linen) tunics; they are Corippus's *candida turba*.¹⁸³ A variety of descriptions of imperial ceremonies, not least in Corippus, state that the guards' superiors carefully arranged the spatial positioning of guards and other participants to evoke wonder and awe.¹⁸⁴ This was not a late antique invention; earlier emperors had done the same. The fragments of the third-century historian Dexippus perhaps provide the most detailed description of the thought that went into such displays, in the context of the emperor Aurelian's reception of ambassadors from the Juthungi in the early 270s.¹⁸⁵

Rom. 14.10 (PG 40:537). Lib. *Or.* 12.82; Prudent., *Apotheosis* 495–97. It is not immediately clear if the prohibition of jeweled bridles in *Cod. Iust.* 11.12.1 also applies to the imperial guards; the bridles, in any case, were certainly made of gold (Theophylact Simocatta, *History* 6.2).

182 Compare the intriguing, though almost certainly garbled, account of John Lydus, *Mag.* 12, who states that the uniform of the excubitores derived directly from Roman dress of the time of Aeneas and Romulus.

183 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.156–64. They are called *protectores* here because by the sixth century the *protectores/domestici*, a corps of staff officers grown from what had originally been informal bodyguards, had been amalgamated into the scholae; cf. M. Emion, “Les protectores Augusti,” in *Corps du chef et gardes du corps dans l’armée romaine*, ed. C. Wolff and P. Faure (Paris, 2020), 473–96; M. Emion, *Les protectores augusti (III^e–VI^e s. a.C.)* (Bordeaux, 2023).

184 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.156–64. Cf. the *Anonymus Valesianus* (II 76f.) and Procopius, *History of the Wars* 2.21.2–3 for an audience that Belisarius held in the field, in which the carefully ordered and arranged lines of his soldiers figure prominently.

185 Dexippus, *Brill’s New Jacoby*: 100 F 6.2–3 (= C. de Boor, ed., *Excerpta de legationibus Romanorum ad gentes* [Berlin, 1903], 20): ἐπει δὲ καλῶς εἶχεν αὐτῷ ή διακόσμησι, ἐπὶ ύψηλοῦ βρύματος μετέωρος βέβηκε καὶ ἀλουργίδα ἀμπέχων τὴν πάσταν τάξιν ἐποιεὶ ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν μηνοειδῆ. Παρεστήσατο δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐν τελει, δσοι ἀρχάς τινας ἐπιτετραμμένοι, σύμπαντας ἐφ’ ἵππων. Κατόπιν δὲ βασιλέως τὰ σημεῖα ἦν τῆς ἐπιλέκτου στρατιᾶς – τὰ δὲ εἰσιν ἀετοὶ χρυσοὶ καὶ εἰκόνες βασιλείοι καὶ στρατοπέδων κατάλογοι γράμμασι χρυσοῖς δηλούμενοι – ἀ δὴ σύμπαντα ἀνατεταμένα προυφαίνετο ἐπὶ ξυστῶν ἡργυρωμένων. ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ὡς διακοσμηθείσιν Ἰουθούγγους ἥξουν <παρελθεῖν>. τοὺς δὲ συνέβη θαυμάζουσθαι ιδόντας καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ σιγῇ ἔχειν (“When he found the units arranged to his satisfaction, he mounted a high speaker's platform and, donning a purple robe, he arranged the entire force around him in a crescent. He also placed beside him any officers who had been in any command, all of them on horseback. Behind the emperor were the standards of the élite units—golden eagles, images of the emperor, and plaques showing the names of the units picked out in

The attractive appearance and lavish equipment of the guards, clad in distinct colors, fine silks, and golden armor and carrying golden arms, were not idle ostentation, but an expression of imperial ideology and power. Within the palace, the heavily gilded and jewel-encrusted military paraphernalia played a role in an intricate choreography of light involving the guards, palace officials, the emperor, and the architecture and decoration of the buildings. By their physical appearance and their splendid apparel, guards served to invoke both awe and terror, to borrow from Liudprand, to visualize the formidable power of Roman superiority and to remind onlookers of the continued success and triumph enjoyed by their ruler.

During ceremonies, guards stood shoulder to shoulder in ordered ranks as if “leafy oaks amid sacred rivers” and “of equal height and glittering equally.”¹⁸⁶ The planning and desired effect of impressing observers find further confirmation in that specific units, particularly mounted ones—the scholae palatinae were technically cavalry units—were specially equipped to reinforce the notion of impersonal and implacable masses of soldiers in serried ranks and of awesome appearance in all senses. The description of armored cavalry as found in the works of Claudian and the emperor Julian himself is particularly telling in this regard, as it emphasizes the guards almost inhuman appearance. Claudian says of the movement of armored cavalry that it was “as though iron statues moved,” and Julian notes the metal masks “which makes the wearer look like a glittering statue.”¹⁸⁷ The deportment of a statue—calm,

gold letters—all held aloft and displayed on poles sheathed in silver. With everything so arranged he ordered the Juthungi to enter. The ambassadors, when they beheld his spectacle, were struck dumb with astonishment,” trans. *Brill’s New Jacoby*). Cf. C. Rollinger, “Changing the Guard: Guard Units and Roman State Ceremonial in the First to Fourth Century,” in *The Roman Imperial Court in the Principate and Late Antiquity*, ed. C. Davenport and M. McEvoy (Oxford, 2023), 56–74, and C. Rollinger, “Specie Dominationis: The ‘Ceremonial’ Uses of Imperial Bodyguards under the Principate,” in *Brill’s Companion to Bodyguards in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. M. Hebblewhite and C. Whately (Leiden, 2022), 223–48 for similar, earlier examples of the ceremonial employ of guards.

186 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.165–79 (trans. Cameron, *In laudem*).

187 Claudian, *In Ruf.* lines 355–65, esp. 359–60: *horribiles visu: credas simulacula moveri / ferrea*. Julian, *Or.* I 37c–d: τὸ κράνος αὐτῷ προσώπῳ σιδηροῦν ἐπικείμενον ἀνδριάντος λαμπτροῦ. Cf. Julian, *Or.* 2.57: αὐτοὶ δὲ ἀτεχνῶς ὥσπερ ἀνδριάντες ἐπὶ τῶν ἵππων φερόμενοι.

immobile, serene, but terrible in its majesty—is exactly the behavior Constantius II adopted and thought appropriate for his public appearances, as evident from Ammianus's famous description of the adventus into Rome in 357.¹⁸⁸ Here, as in other things, the guards emulated the emperor.

The well-dressed, sparkling, angelic, and intimidating figures surrounding the ruler served a “diplomatic” purpose within the context of audience ceremonials, in that they were intended to project an image of power and majesty in the envoys' minds. At the same time, they also played a role in the complex choreography of the spatial icon of the emperor enthroned in majesty. They are mirror images of the dramatis personae of the Heavenly Court, with the courtiers in the role of the elders of John's Apocalypse, and bodyguards and court eunuchs as the angelic messengers, protectors, and worshipers of God.¹⁸⁹ The *Vision of Dorotheus* (Papyrus Bodmer 29), a fascinating literary text surviving on a single papyrus and presumably dating to the fourth century, shows how intimately connected the two courts were thought to be and, tellingly, is written from the perspective of a heavenly (and earthly?) guard soldier.¹⁹⁰ In 343 verses of dactylic hexameter, the eponymous Dorotheus narrates a vision that came to him while alone in the imperial palace in the middle of the day, a remarkable circumstance in itself. In the vision, he comes face to face with God and part of the Heavenly Court, which he is only able to describe in terms and concepts borrowed from

¹⁸⁸ Amm. Marc. 16.10.9–10. Cf. Xen., *Cyr.* 8.40; 42, but also see R. Flower, “*Tamquam figmentum hominis*: Ammianus, Constantius II and the Portrayal of Imperial Ritual,” *CQ* 65 (2015): 822–35, for a reading *à rebours*.

¹⁸⁹ Rev. 4:4–11.

¹⁹⁰ P. Bodmer 29 (A. Kessels and P. van der Horst, ed. and trans., “The Vision of Dorotheus [Pap. Bodmer 29]: Edited with Introduction, Translation and Notes,” *VChr* 41 [1987]: 313–59). All translations are from this original publication. Cf. D. Van Berchem, “Des soldats chrétiens dans la garde impériale: Observations sur le texte de la *Vision de Dorothéos* (Papyrus Bodmer XXIX),” *Studii Clasica* 24 (1986): 156–63; T. Gelzer, “Zur Visio Dorothei: Pap. Bodmer 29,” *MusHelv* 45 (1988): 248–50; D. Van Berchem, “Zur Frage des Verfassers der Visio Dorothei,” in *Le Codex des Visions*, ed. A. Hurst and J. Rudhardt (Geneva, 2002), 139–54; J. Bremmer, “The Vision of Dorotheus,” in *Early Christian Poetry: A Collection of Essays*, ed. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst (Leiden, 1993), 253–62; J. Bremmer, “An Imperial Palace Guard in Heaven: The Date of the Vision of Dorotheus,” *ZPapEpig* 75 (1988): 82–88.

the context of the imperial bodyguards and thus the Constantinopolitan court:

I was sitting as a doorkeeper in the middle of the *praepositi* / and there also was a *domesticus* of the Lord . . . [. . .] / Being changed I received a privilege as before: / the *praepositi* of the palace had me as their *tiro* near the *biarchoi* . . . [. . .] / and on the other hand in front of the Lord's *primicerius* / Gabriel was standing [. . .] . . . and the elder jumped forth / and they ordered me to take my position at the porch and by no means / to enter the house nor to be driven out of the palace, / but that I should be guarding the very porch and the fence of the courtyard.¹⁹¹

Praipositi here refers not to members of the *cubiculum* or the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, but to the chief of the various administrative scholae, of which the narrator was made a member as *ostiarius*.¹⁹² As he is negligent in his duties and attempts to deceive Christ himself, Dorotheus is punished, sentenced to flagellation in the *signa* (a place of imprisonment in a military camp) for leaving his post while on duty.¹⁹³ After his atonement, Christ and the archangel Gabriel again confront him, and when brought before God the Father, he declines to take Dorotheus back into his service, saying, “Surely that is not a man who will be able to stand close to / the gate of the ante-chamber; send him back to where he came from: / another man you must bring and give him strength in addition / to stand guard over the palace as a guardian of the courtyard.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Bracketed ellipses added. P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, lines 17–18, 42–43, 49–50, 55–58: ἥμην πραιποίτοισιν ἐνὶ μ[έσσου]ι θυ[ρωρός] / καὶ τε δομέστικος ἡν ἀνα[κτος] . . . ἄλλοις] δὲ ἐών γέρας ἔλλαχον ὃς τὸ πάρος περ· / π[ραιπο]σίτοισι δόμοισιν ἔην τίρων ἄγχι βιάρχων . . . / οιο[. . .]γίσι καὶ δ' αὐτοὶ πριμικῆρος ἄνακτος / πρ[όσθεν Γ] αθριηὴ ἡν γέρας αἰνὸν ὑπῆ[ε]ξαν δὲ γέροντες / κ]αύ με κέλε>ον προθύροισιν ἐφεστάμεν οὕτι μᾶλ' ἔνδον / ἐλθέμεν [οὐ τι καὶ ἐτκός ἀπὸ μεγάροι δίεσθαι / ἀ]λλ' αὐτὰ[ς θυρέας] τε φυλαξέμεν ἔρκεα τ' αὐλῆς.

¹⁹² P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, line 131.

¹⁹³ P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, lines 131–312. On *signa*, see M. Letteney and M. Larsen, “A Roman Military Prison at Lambaesis,” *Studies in Late Antiquity* 5 (2021): 65–102.

¹⁹⁴ P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, lines 184–87: ἦ ρ' οὐκχ οὔτος ἀνήρ γε δυνήσεται ἀγ[χι] θυρά[ων] / ἐστάμεναι προδόμοιο· ἀφῆτε μιν [ε]νθεν [ὑπ]ῆλθ[εν] . . . παρφυλακήν ποιέειν μεγάροι[· ἀτ' ἐπίτρο]πον αὐ[λῆς].

Dorotheus is saved by the intercession of Christ and Gabriel and reinstated among the bodyguards. After a ritual washing, baptism, he appears for service as a man changed in appearance and name. Now called Andreas, he shines “brilliant as the sun” (*ώς ήελιος καταλάμπων*), a “great and untouchable giant in the ante-chamber”:¹⁹⁵

and I came marching again to take my stand at the / high gate, and with my head I stood out high above the doors / of his palace. From afar the men looked at me in astonishment, / seeing how big I was and that I did not have simple clothing, / but a cloak, when I was standing at the gate as before, / was I wearing, made for me from two different sorts of linen. . . . For I also wore a glittering belt.¹⁹⁶

As Jan Bremmer has rightly noted, this dress is reminiscent of the uniform of the white-clad candidati.¹⁹⁷ In fact, imperial references saturate the *Vision of Dorotheus*, making the author’s familiarity with imperial appearances obvious. The washing and rebirth of Dorotheus/Andreas through baptism, which is only at first glance purely spiritual, also testifies to this. Dorotheus/Andreas is in a bad state after his scourging and covered with blood.¹⁹⁸ Through the act of baptism, he acquires a new, more beautiful physical form. The other attendants are astounded at Dorotheus’s appearance and look at him in astonishment as he stands guard.¹⁹⁹ In Corippus’s depiction, too, the Avar ambassadors are impressed by the *candida turba* of the *protectores* and taken aback by the magnificent appearance of these imperial guards.²⁰⁰

195 P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, line 298: μέγα[ς ήδ]ὲ πελώρος ἀκήριος ἐν προδόμῳ.

196 P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, lines 326–34: καὶ ἐπέσ-·τι χρον αῦτις ἐν ὑψηλαῖς θυρ[έ]σιν / ιστάμενος, κεφαλῆ δ’ ὑπερίσχανον ὕψι θυρ]άων / οἰο δόμοιο. ἔκηθεν ἐθάμβεον εἰς ἐμὲ [φῶτε]ς / οἰος μακρὸς ἔην καὶ β’ οὐκ ἔχον ἐνδόμυ[α λιτόν], / χλαινῶν δ’ ὡς τὸ πάρος περ ἐφεσταμέ-νο[ς θυρ]έησιν / εἶχον, ἔμοι ἀλλοίοις ἐνί λινέεσι δυσισ[ι]. . . . / καὶ γὰρ ἔχον ζωστῆρα παναιόλον.

197 Bremmer, “Imperial Palace Guard,” 86. Cf. Amm. Marc. 25.3.6, 31.13.14.

198 P. Bodmer 29 Kessels and van der Horst, lines 145, 150–52, 160, 199, 206, 212.

199 P. Bodmer 29, lines 299–304, 328–35.

200 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.239–43; *ingentes astare viros. Scuta aurea cernunt / pilaque suspiciunt alto splendentia ferro*

Power Smells

Within the logic of ceremonial audiences, the presence of the divinely sanctioned ruler together with that of eunuchs-cum-angels transforms a secular ceremony into a quasi-religious ritual. The *Vision of Dorotheus* is a striking text that illustrates the close association of the heavenly and earthly courts and demonstrates the permeability of the barrier between them. The emperor himself played a decisive role in breaking the membrane separating the earthly from the heavenly realm. He stood at the center of every ceremony as the fulcrum, and the splendor of his guards, courtiers, servants, eunuchs, soldiers, thrones, halls, and palaces existed to further highlight his position of exaltedness. As John Chrysostom explained, “But when we see the king we immediately lose sight of all these. For he alone turns our eyes to him, and to the purple robe, and the diadem, and the throne, and the clasp, and the shoes, all that splendor of his appearance.”²⁰¹

In this show, the emperor was aided by the choreography of light as well as other sensate elements—elements—that is, sounds and smells, which though more sparsely attested in the sources warrant brief discussion. Though middle Byzantine ceremonies are richly attested, one cannot state with certainty whether music—be it the chanting and singing of hymns or organ playing—was a part of late antique audiences. To be sure, all three were important elements of other ceremonies: church choirs performed during imperial rituals in Hagia Sophia and the palace, for instance, during formal banquets; the organ was associated with the Hippodrome and imperial appearances there. Nowhere in the sources, however, is there a hint of music in the context of audiences.

There is some circumstantial evidence for the use of perfumed oils, incense, balms, and fragrant flowers during some ceremonies, including the audience. From the *Book of Ceremonies*, for instance, one learns that in the tenth century, the passageways and halls of the Great Palace were decorated with wreaths and garlands of

/ aurea et auratos conos cristasque rubentes. / Horrescunt lanceas sae-vasque instare secures / ceteraque egregiae spectant miracula pompa. See Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.156–64, for the appearance of the *protectorum numerus*.

201 John Chrysostom, *Hom. in ep. Rom.* 14.10 (PG 60:537): ἐκεῖνος γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἐπιστρέφει μόνος, καὶ τὰ πορφυρᾶ ιμάτια, καὶ τὸ διάδημα, καὶ ἡ καθέδρα, καὶ ἡ περόνη, καὶ τὰ ὑπόδηματα, ἡ πολλὴ τῆς ὅψεως λαμπηδών.

various shapes made of laurels and seasonal flowers; the pavement and floors of passageways were strewn with ivy and laurel and those and the ceremonial halls and rooms with myrtle and rosemary.²⁰² This may be what Corippus had witnessed when he wrote of the palace being exceptionally decorated; there is ample evidence from the earlier imperial period of fragrant liquids, flowers, and blossoms being strewn during aristocratic and imperial banquets or used for cleaning.²⁰³ The criticism of Elagabalus in the *Historia Augusta*, written around 400, was likely a reflection of contemporary, late antique practices, rather than a faithful account of that much-maligned emperor's antics in the early third century. Thus, one reads that Elagabalus "would have perfumes from India burned without any coals, in order that the fumes might fill his apartments" and "he used to strew roses and all manner of flowers, such as lilies, and narcissi, over his banqueting-rooms, his couches and his porticoes, and then stroll about in them."²⁰⁴ For imperial weddings, there is more direct evidence, as in the *Epithalamium* of Claudian on the occasion of the marriage of Honorius to Maria, daughter of Stilicho and Verena. In the poem, Venus herself oversees the arrangements for the festivities and orders: "Let these haste to entwine the gleaming door-posts with my sacred myrtle. Do sprinkle the palace with drops of nectar and kindle a whole grove of Sabaean incense."²⁰⁵

Since the sources omit any mention of specific olfactory components of audience ceremonies in the

sixth century, one should be mindful of hypothesizing too carelessly. Yet, despite the lack of direct evidence, for example of special braziers or *thymateria* in which incense or saffron were burned, it is probably correct to assume that these fragrances were used as a matter of course. Of note, the twenty-four elders surrounding God in John's Apocalypse are in fact described as carrying "golden censers full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints,"²⁰⁶ a simile that both alludes to the connection between certain smells and the divine and recalls the use of incense burners in religious and imperial rituals such as (and very likely) audiences. Scents, balms, oils, and wines and foods (during banquets, to which diplomats were also invited as a matter of course) arrived from all corners of the Roman ecumene as *emolumenta imperii* (as did expensive textiles, such as silk, and gemstones and pearls) to showcase the unlimited reach of the empire.²⁰⁷ Candles could be scented, and it was common practice to mix the oil burned in lamps with perfumes or unguents, which would have diffused a sweet smell in every room of the palace.²⁰⁸ Again, there is indirect evidence in the sources: in Claudian's poems, palaces of both gods or emperors are associated with sweet scents.²⁰⁹ The *Book of Ceremonies* attests that even during imperial travels, the retinue carried along fragrances and balms in large quantities.²¹⁰ Incense, particularly associated with funerals in antiquity, was by no means the only fragrance used, and neither was it only used during the ceremony.²¹¹ Corippus mentions the burning of an abundance of incense (*pia tura*) on the occasion of Justinian's funeral in 565.²¹² His precise

202 *Book of Ceremonies* 2.15 (ed. Reiske, 566–98).

203 See for example, Plin. *HN* 25.59.105–107, 109, 216–17; Petron. *Sat.* 68. For further examples, see B. Caseau, "Incense and Fragrances: From House to Church," in *Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400–1453)*, ed. M. Grünbart, E. Kislinger, A. Muthesius, and D. Stathakopoulos (Vienna, 2007), 75–92.

204 Scriptores Historiae Augustae (hereafter SHA), *Heliogabalus* 31.4: *odores Indicos sine carbonibus ad vaporandas diaetas iubebat incendi* and 19.7: *stravit et triclinia de rosa et lectos et porticus ac sic deambulavit, idque omniflorum genere, liliis, violis, hyacinthis et narcissis* (D. Magie, trans., *Historia Augusta*, vol. 2 [Cambridge, MA, 1924]). In later centuries, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* 6.64 (D. R. Reinsch, ed., *Michaelis Pselli Chronographia*, Millennium Studies 51, vol. 1 [Berlin, 2014]), recounts that the empress Zoe had a private workshop for manufacturing perfumes in her palace quarters.

205 Claudian, *Epithal.* 208–10: *hi nostra nitidos postes obducere myrto contendat; pars nectareis adspergite tecta fontibus et flamma lucos adolete Sabaeos* (trans. B. Caseau, "Εὐωδία: The Use and Meaning of Fragrances in the Ancient World and Their Christianization [100–900 AD]" [PhD diss., Princeton University, 1994], 122).

206 Rev. 5:8: ἔχοντες ἔκαστος . . . φιάλας χρυσᾶς γεμούσας θυμαμάτων, οἵ εἰσιν αἱ προσευχαὶ τῶν ὄγρων.

207 Cf. Ball, *Byzantine Dress*, 15.

208 Cf., again, SHA *Elagab.* 2.4.1, and cf. Petron. *Sat.* 70.9. Tert., *De cor. mil.* 10.5.

209 Claudian, *Epithal.* 92–96; 154–55.

210 *Book of Ceremonies*, app. I (ed. Reiske, 468): ἀλειπτὰ, καπνίσματα διάφορα, θυμίαμα, μαστίχην, λίβανον, σάχαρ, κρόκον, μόσχον, ἄμπαρ, ξυλαλοήν ύγρὰν καὶ ξηρὰν, κιννάμωμον ἀληθινὸν πρῶτον καὶ δεύτερον, καὶ ξυλοκιννάμωμον, μυρίσματα λοιπά.

211 Myrrh, saffron, cinnamon, nard, and hyacinths were also frequently used (Stat., *Silv.* 2.6.85–89; Prop. 4.7.32; Claudian, *II Cons. Stil.* 420). Plutarch recounts that the women of Rome gathered such quantities of spices and incense for Sulla's funeral that they had to be transported to the funeral pyre in no less than 210 separate litters (Plut., *Sull.* 38). Cf. D. Clancy, "The Smell of Grief: Odour and Olfaction at the Roman Funeral," *thersites* 9 (2019): 89–116.

212 Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 3.55.

wording is instructive here: it was burnt *transitus ob causa*, which can mean “on the occasion of his passing,” but could also be translated as “to facilitate his passing,” that is, to heaven. This is no accident. Sweet and pleasant smells were always closely associated with the divine sphere by both Christians and non-Christians. Saints and other martyrs as well as their relics emitted a fragrant smell, and God himself needed the scent of neither flowers nor incense, as he himself was the “final fragrance.”²¹³ Sweet smells filled the Heavenly Jerusalem, and whatever “was near to God, whatever was sent or given by God—these were known by their wondrous smells.”²¹⁴

By filling the palace with similar smells, the organizers of ceremonial thus not only assured the well-being and olfactory satisfaction of the residents, but also connected the earthly palace to the divine realm. These fragrances conveyed an allegorical meaning, but were also thought to physically and spiritually interact with the bodies of those who came into contact with them; they had the power to break the thin membrane between the earthly and the supernatural and to allow humans to encounter and interact with the divine.²¹⁵ Thus, fragrances were not only an attribute of the holy, but also a means of communication, a way in which “human and divine could meet—not face to face as distinct realities, but intermingled in a communion of being. . . . To smell God was to know God as a transcendent yet transforming presence, a presence actively known through bodily experience.”²¹⁶ Their use in palace ceremonial would have further facilitated the sensory, aesthetic, and ideological association of the imperial court with the heavenly archetype. In fact, this seems to have been the explicit intention, as indicated by a fascinating entry in the *Book of the Eparch*, usually ascribed to Leo VI but likely an evolving compendium of rules and guidelines for city guilds. It provides the following instruction for the guild of perfumers: “Let their counters stand in a

line comprised between the miliarion and the revered eikon of Christ, our divine Lord, which stands above the bronze portico, so that the sweet perfume may waft upwards to the eikon and at the same time permeate the vestibule of the imperial palace.”²¹⁷

Conclusion: Audiences in Another Heaven

Throughout, this lengthy analysis has attempted to show that the concepts of image paradigms and spatial icons à la Lidov are a useful heuristic tool for better understanding the symbolic meanings and communicative intentions of imperial ceremonies. For the purposes of these ceremonies, the emperor should be understood as being part of a spatial icon. This approach has two significant implications. The first implication concerns the ideological import of the ceremony itself—in short, understanding that ceremonial literally embodied the imperial idea. The image paradigm of the Heavenly Jerusalem was the basis of the most formal of audience ceremonies in the silention, and those responsible for organizing and putting on those ceremonies took specific measures to drive home this impression, to connect the lived ceremony with the imagined paradigm. They used choreography, lighting, decoration, costumes, smells, sounds, and visuals to reify the notion that the earthly court mirrored the heavenly one. The second implication is that to really understand the semiotics of the audience ceremony itself, its “grammar” and ideological implications, it is necessary to incorporate into one’s analysis all the material and immaterial elements of late antique ceremonial that informed the rich symbolic meaning of the ritual. In other words, one needs to look at the ceremonies not as images, but as performance (or installation) art. It is not enough to only take into account the figure of the emperor and the gestures made by him and the other participants of the ceremony. In this, Lidov’s methodology is helpful.

²¹³ Athenagoras, *Leg. 13.2* (M. Marcovich, ed., *Athenagoras, Legatio Pro Christianis*, PTS 31 [Berlin, 1990]): ἡ τελεία εὐωδίᾳ. Cf. Eccles. (Jesus Sirach) 24:20–21: *et quasi balsamum non mixtum odor meus*. See Caseau, “Εὐωδίᾳ,” 218–20; S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, 2006), 11–21; 46–56; James, “Senses.” It was also thought that authentic relics could be identified by the sweet smell they gave off.

²¹⁴ Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 54. Cf. Caseau, “Εὐωδίᾳ,” 252–60.

²¹⁵ James, “Senses,” 525–26; Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 64.

²¹⁶ Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 65.

²¹⁷ *Book of the Eparch* 10.1 (J. Koder, ed., *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, CFHB 33 [Vienna, 1991]): Ἐστωσαν δὲ τὰ τούτων ἀβθάκια μετὰ καὶ τῶν καβιών ἀπὸ τῆς πανσέπτου εἰκόνος Χριστοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν τῆς ἐπὶ τῇ Χαλκῇ στοιχηδὸν ιστάμενα μέχρι τοῦ Μῆλου, ὡς ἂν εἰς εὐωδίαν ἀρμοζόντως τῆς εἰκόνος καὶ τέρψιν τῶν βασιλικῶν προσωπίων εἴησαν. For the English, E. H. Freshfield, trans., *Roman Law in the Later Roman Empire: The Isaurian Period, Eighth Century, the Edicta* [Cambridge, 1938], repr. in *TO ΕΙΑΡΧΙΚΟΝ ΒΙΒΛΙΟΝ / The Book of the Eparch / Le Livre du Préfet*, with an introduction by Professor Ivan Dujcev [London, 1970], chap. 5).

When conceptualizing the emperor as a spatial icon in Lidov's interpretation, however, one must fully grasp the term. In Byzantine and Orthodox understanding, an icon is not simply a two- (or three-)dimensional image, but a pathway to an otherworldly sphere—a "channel" to the divine. This applies to the spatial imperial icon as well. An audience with the emperor, in terms of ideology, was also meant to be an "otherworldly" experience in that the emperor was not a mere ruler, but God's directly appointed viceroy. To adapt Lidov's term, the formal imperial audience was a "hierotopy" of power, an irruption of the divine into the politic. Through the performative presentation of the ideological foundation of the ceremonial, the court's active participation, and the ubiquity of the image paradigm at its root, the audience at the court of the emperor became a ceremony at the heavenly court of God. Understanding it as such explains in part the importance of ceremonial to late Roman and Byzantine emperors.

The emperor was not alone in ceremonies, however, and the officially sanctioned, top-down projection of symbolic meaning was (and is) not the only way in which to make sense of ceremonies. Participants in ceremonies brought their own perspectives and interpretations to the table. Individual or group receptions of ceremonial, its understanding or interpretation, depended on a number of factors: the participants, familiarity with ceremonies, their erudition or attentiveness to ceremonial details, their status and rank, their relationship with the emperor or elites, and, not least, the degree of their integration into the Roman world and thus their understanding of it. The effect and received message of individual elements of the ceremony and of the ceremony as a whole depended on these factors.

For instance, there is no knowing whether foreign envoys picked up on the deeper symbolism of most of the ceremonial elements discussed here. On the whole, it would seem rather unlikely in the case of envoys from non-Christian nations. The reason Corippus could believably claim that the Avar envoys thought themselves in "another heaven" had nothing to do with the envoys themselves, who would not necessarily have had any notion of the Heavenly Jerusalem or, indeed, the Christian vision of the Heavenly Court of God. In their eyes, the actual displaying of material wealth, military power, and civilizational advances—which over the centuries the court in Constantinople had learned to

present in elaborate and refined ceremonies—would have been the main point. After all, their own rulers would have attempted similar displays, meant to impress and cow, during audiences at their courts, to which Roman envoys regularly traveled. External groups had always been quick to pick up on the advantages of Roman wealth and a Roman lifestyle and keenly attuned to the importance of displayed wealth in diplomacy, as illustrated, for example, by the description of Attila's court in the fragments of accounts by Priskos and Menander the Guardsman's about a Roman embassy to the Turks.²¹⁸ Persian ambassadors were perhaps another case. Conceivably, they may have had a better understanding of political ideology due to the centuries-long history of diplomacy between Rome and Persia, which would have bred a certain familiarity at the least, and given the existence within the Sāsānian Empire of a significant Christian (albeit, from a Constantinopolitan point of view, heterodox) community, whose head, the catholico of Seleucia-Babylon, was a salaried official of the state.

There was certainly an element of one-upmanship to ancient diplomacy, particularly in Romano-Persian relations, and there is at least circumstantial evidence of mutual influencing, particularly between the Roman and Persian courts, the "Two Eyes of the World."²¹⁹ This begs an important, but ultimately impossible to answer, question: Quite apart from the cosmological implications of the ceremonies that a Persian noble

²¹⁸ Priskos, *History*, frag. 11 and 12.1 (R. C. Blockley, ed., *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2 [Liverpool, 1983]); Menander the Guardsman, *History*, frag. 10.3 (ed. Blockley).

²¹⁹ Theophylact Simocatta, *History* 4.11.2–3. On the cultural exchanges and the cold war-like ritual competition between the two courts, see M. Canepa, *The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sasanian Iran* (Berkeley, 2009). There are hints in seventh-century sources that Khosro II in fact choreographed a Roman accession ceremony in Edessa in 603 when he proclaimed the alleged son of Maurice as emperor in his war against Phocas: *Khuzistan Chronicle* 14 (G. Greatrex and S. N. C. Lieu, trans. and eds., *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars: Part II, AD 363–630* [London, 2002], 229–37), the *Seert Chronicle* 199, 223–24 (A. Scher, ed., *Histoire Nestorienne [Chronique de Séert]*, PO 13.4.65 [Paris, 1918]), and the *History of Khosrow* (Ps.-Seb. 107, 110–11, R. W. Thomson, ed., *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, trans. R. W. Thomson, comm. J. Howard-Johnston, TTH 31 [Liverpool, 1999]). On the implications of this, see C. Rollinger, "#notmyemperor: Theodosios, Son of Maurice, Revisited," in *Fake News in Antiquity*, ed. D. de Brasi, T. Tsampokalos, and A. Papathomas (forthcoming).

witnessed, just how impressed would he have been with the pomp of the Roman court when already accustomed to the different, but surely no less impressive rituals at the court of Ctesiphon? Roman ceremonial would have doubtlessly impressed and, perhaps, terrified envoys from “barbarian” peoples more than courtiers from a similarly advanced and centrally organized state such as that of the Sāsānians.

Awing foreigners certainly constituted an important part of diplomatic ceremonial. It even played a role, albeit a more subtle one, when the envoys hailed from friendly or, indeed, very friendly states. Two chapters in the *Book of Ceremonies* describe the protocol for admissions involving envoys from the Western Empire, which obviously must date to no later than the fifth century.²²⁰ The ceremony itself was not much different from the general model described above, but the instructions in the *Book of Ceremonies* are a striking proof of both the flexibility of Roman ceremonial and its inherent ability to impart even minuscule nuances, immediately understandable by the target audience. Concessions were made to the envoys being Roman (albeit from a potentially rival court); the envoys themselves, as well as their staff, were ceremonially integrated into the hierarchy of the Constantinopolitan court according to their rank, to which appropriate deference was shown.²²¹ For instance, when being admitted into the imperial presence, Roman envoys were not preceded by a special section of guards, as other envoys were, “because the ambassadors are not barbarians.”²²² These Romans would naturally have been attuned to the symbolic and ideological implications of individual elements of the ceremony—which is not to say that there would not have been an element of one-upmanship here, too—with which they would

220 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.87–88 (ed. Reiske, 393–98).

221 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.87 (ed. Reiske, 394): It is explicitly stated that “nothing is done otherwise than is customary for [bearers of these] titles here” (οὐτε ἄλλο τί ποτε τῶν εἰωθέτων ἐπὶ ταῖς ἐνταῦθα ἀρχαῖς γίνεται).

222 *Book of Ceremonies* 1.87 (ed. Reiske, 394): ἀρμάτοι δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ βασιλεώς οὐκ εἰσέρχονται διὰ τὸ μὴ εἶναι βαρβάρους τοὺς πρεσβευτάς. There is also no “summons” (*citatio*, rendered in Greek as *κιτατίων*) by the magister, as there is for foreign envoys (*κιτατίονος μὴ γνωμένης ὡς ἐπὶ ἄλλων πρεσβεύων*). This refers to the official, written summons of the envoys to court that an assistant of the magister (*συνβαδίονβα, subadiuva*) or a *decurio* delivers to the diplomats on the eve of the audience (*Book of Ceremonies* 1.89, ed. Reiske 403). These are presented to the *admissionalis* before the envoys are admitted in front of the enthroned emperor.

likely have been familiar, although the sources are silent on this; much less is known about the ceremonies of the Western court than that of the East, and there is no telling to what extent sixth-century ceremonies precisely mirrored earlier ones.²²³

As previously mentioned, however, it is mostly the inherent nature of the extant sources, which describe the elaborate ceremonial of diplomatic audiences, rather than those of “normal” admissions, that creates the impression of there being a focus on the diplomatic. Not all audiences involved diplomats; indeed, most did not. Regardless of who was being admitted, every audience of the emperor was imbued with concurrent symbolisms and complex and highly ideologized webs of references, allusions, and metaphors. They were aimed at all participants, but each would have received them differently. From the standpoint of foreign envoys, for instance, the palace and court elites were certainly perceived as part of the late Roman state and its display of splendor; glorified extras in a theatrical show of power, or to quote T.S. Eliot, each an “attendant lord, one that will do / To swell a progress, start a scene or two.”²²⁴ Byzantine court officials, though they would likely have taken pride in lording it over steppe “barbarians,” themselves viewed the ceremony differently. Thus, what to the envoys was an agonistic display of soft and hard power, and what was to the emperor and his top officials an opportunity to reify a divinely ordained hierarchy of power (not least to the court), could also be, to the middle and lower hierarchies of the court, a means of ascertaining and navigating relative status or power configurations in court circles, which were easily observable. Ceremonies visualized power structures and hierarchies. Courtiers and all participants in ceremonial were spatially placed and organized as a reflection of their relative rank within the court and broader imperial hierarchy. This is clear from the detailed descriptions of such ceremonial in the *Book of Ceremonies*,

223 I would argue for a significant degree of overlap or consistency, as ceremonies are by their very nature conservative and traditional. The same applies to them in later centuries, though in this case the role of iconoclasm in transforming both ideology and expressions of the ideology is almost unfathomable. The ideological foundations, in any case, remained the same, and most ideologemes of the divinely appointed Christian ruler can be traced back to the political theology of Eusebius.

224 T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Cf. Luchterhandt, “Bilder ohne Worte,” 347.

which reflect an obsession with τάξις (order) and rank. Each dignitary had his own place, behind or below those of higher status, in front of or above those of lower status, closer to or more distant from the imperial figure himself. To the trained observer, the social hierarchy of the court was thus obvious from this spatial disposition alone. From the perspective of the courtier, all audience ceremonies and all ceremonial presented (among other things) a means of ascertaining their own position in the political cosmos and then competing against their peers. Furthermore, the acquiescence in the very framework of spatial ordering implied the courtier's consent and acceptance of the position of the monarch as ultimate arbitrator of status and rank.²²⁵ Such gestures of submission needed to be legitimized, to make sense within an ideological framework, and to be performed physically and spatially. The vehicle for that was ceremony. In the case of imperial audiences, it was not only Rome's superiority over other peoples being staged performatively, nor even a simple visualization of social and court order, but rather the courtiers' and elite's own assent to imperial ideology.

²²⁵ Rollinger, "Being Splendid." Cf. S. Schmidt-Hofner, "Ehrensachen: Ranggesetzgebung, Elitenkonkurrenz und die Funktion des Rechts in der Spätantike," *Chiron* 40 (2010): 209–44.

THIS ARTICLE HAS BEEN LONG IN THE making. From inception, it was part of a larger work on late antique imperial ceremonial in general, currently being prepared for publication as C. Rollinger, *Zeremoniell und Herrschaft in der Spätantike: Die Rituale des Kaiserhofs in Konstantinopel (4.–7. Jh.)* (Stuttgart, forthcoming 2024). While that monograph presents a systematic overview of the evolution and political import of Byzantine ceremonies as a multifaceted means of communication in the context of urban emperorship, the article here is a case study more focused on Byzantine ritual aesthetics and symbolism in a specific ceremony—the diplomatic exchange—and seeks to introduce a new approach to the study of ceremonies.

The analysis presented here is based on papers I delivered at the Danish Institute in Rome and at the

Neither these dynamics of relative power and status between heterogenous groups of participants, nor the ideological accretion of legitimacy through performance took place only in audiences, though they make for an especially striking case study. In almost every appearance of the emperor, the court was also involved. Officials and palace elites accompanied him during urban perambulations, surrounded him in church, attended him in the Hippodrome. In this regard, the emperor was seldom without his court, just as God was never without his seraphim and cherubim. Courtiers and officials—through their participation in the ceremonial exaltation of the emperor, by the veneration of the spatial icon of the emperor, by their acquiescence to being moved about on the playing field of ceremonial like so many rooks and knights and bishops—inserted themselves into the ceremonially constructed image of the divinely appointed ruler propagated by the court and assumed the subordinate positions assigned to them by the divine Creator and his earthly viceregent. As in heaven, so on earth.

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